

489

Library of the Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.

Presented by Mr. Samuel Agnew of Philadelphia, Pa.

Agnew Coll. on Baptism, No. 5

SCB
10355
C. 1





INFANT CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP,

OR THE

RELATION OF BAPTIZED CHILDREN

TO

THE CHURCH.

BY WILLIAM A. STEARNS,

Pastor of the Evangelical Congregational Church, Cambridgeport.


B O S T O N :

PUBLISHED BY CROCKER AND BREWSTER,


47 Washington-street.

1844.

Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1844,
By CROCKER AND BREWSTER,
In the Clerk's Office of the District Court of Massachusetts.



TO THE MEMBERS
OF THE
SUFFOLK NORTH ASSOCIATION;
TO THE
CONGREGATIONAL CLERGYMEN OF NEW-ENGLAND;
AND TO ALL
PARENTS IN COVENANT WITH GOD;
THIS VOLUME
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY
THE AUTHOR.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2011 with funding from
Princeton Theological Seminary Library

If temporal estates may be conveyed
By covenants, on condition,
To men and *to their heirs*, be not afraid,
My soul, to rest upon
The covenant of grace, by mercy made.

Do but thy duty and rely upon't,
Repentance, Faith, Obedience,
Whenever practised truly will amount
To an authentic evidence—
Though the deed were *antidoted* at the font.

SYNAGOGUE.



P R E F A C E .

THIS treatise is presented to the churches under a deep sense of religious responsibility. It was not prepared in a controversial spirit. Nor was it intended as an attack upon that large and respectable denomination of Christians who differ most widely from the leading sentiments it contains. It has been the author's design simply to reaffirm and establish one of those great doctrines of puritan and primitive Christianity on which he believes, the perpetuity, stability, and progressive piety of the New-England congregational churches greatly depends.

He was led to the undertaking by providential circumstances, and without the most distant expectation of making his views public. Infant baptism, and the relation of baptized children to the church had been exciting increased attention for several years. Pastors and parents deplored the fact, that "the seed of the church" should be accounted, and educated, in so many instances, as those who are confessedly

“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise.” The subject had often been conversed upon, and discussed, by clergymen in their private meetings, and especially by the Suffolk North Association, with which the author is pleasantly connected, and to the members of which he would take this opportunity to acknowledge himself indebted for many valuable suggestions. At their request, more than three years ago, he was induced to undertake a Biblical investigation of the question, How did our Saviour and his Apostles treat the infant children of believers in reference to church-membership? The inquiry was commenced, as *an assigned duty* which ought to be faithfully performed—but without prejudices in favor of one theory or another, or any special interest at that time in the subject. It was prosecuted with a simple but determined desire to discover and establish the truth. As the result of this inquiry, a dissertation was presented to the Association, which succeeded, somewhat unexpectedly in harmonizing the views of all the members present. After the lapse of several months a vote was passed, requesting its publication. In reviewing the manuscript for this purpose, it appeared to the author that a fuller developement of the principles it contained might be profitable to the churches. For this reason, he was led to examine the whole subject anew, and prepare the treatise which is now given to the public.

The writer has no desire to attach undue importance to the mere externals of religion. He has no

high church principles to sustain, nor any predilections for a more stately worship. He professes to be a congregationalist in church government of the old school,—as nearly a PURITAN of 1648 as the changes of the times will allow. He values the outward only in connection with its spiritual import and influence. Nor is baptism considered by him as a saving ordinance, nor as imparting mysterious efficacy to the infant soul, but only as one of the divinely appointed means of grace, bringing the recipients into a peculiar relation to God and his people and preparing the way for the realization of covenant blessings.

The forms of apostolic and congregational Christianity are few and simple. But being ordained of God, and of great practical utility, they are worthy of sacred preservation. Nor should their importance be underrated in consequence of the tendency in some quarters, to give them unjustifiable sanctity, and load the gospel with human figments and additions. In the opinion of many the church is about to enter upon its last great conflict with *formalism*. Surely it is not well to commence the warfare by a voluntary surrender of any of the great principles we hold in common. True wisdom requires that we understand ourselves, maintain our ground firmly, defend the ordinances as well as the doctrines of Christ, opposing heathenish ceremonies, papal superstitions, antiquated additions, and modern innovations, but sacrificing no jot or tittle of what God has appointed.

It is with the hope of throwing some light upon the covenant relations and duties of baptized children—

of reviving in the New-England churches one of the great principles on which they were founded ;—of assisting to “rear a holy seed,” to take the place of their fathers, in the kingdom of Christ, through successive generations ; to prepare the way for that thorough religious training which when attended with prayer and faith so generally results through grace and according to the promises in the early regeneration of children ; that this book is now respectfully submitted by the

AUTHOR.



CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION,	13
-------------------------	----

CHAPTER I.

PROOF OF THE DOCTRINE OF INFANT CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP.

SECTION 1. Abrahamic Covenant,	17
SECTION 2. Our Saviour's treatment of Children in reference to his Church and Kingdom,	29
SECTION 3. The great Apostolic Commission,	37
SECTION 4. Infant Church-Membership recognised by the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians,	45
SECTION 5. Additional considerations affecting the Question,	48
SECTION 6. Brief Review of the Constitution and gen- eral History of the Church,	51

CHAPTER II.

NATURE AND DEGREE OF INFANT CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP.

SECTION 1. Peculiarity of this Relation,	54
SECTION 2. Children of the Church subject to its supervision,	58
SECTION 3. Other privileges of Baptized Children,	64
SECTION 4. Restrictions upon privileges,	67

CHAPTER III.

PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES OF INFANT CHURCH-MEM- BERSHIP,	79
--	----

CHAPTER IV.

GENERAL SENTIMENT OF NEW-ENGLAND CONGRE- GATIONALISTS AND OTHER REFORMED CHURCHES ON THE SUBJECT,	94
---	----

CHAPTER V.

THE DOCTRINE APPLIED IN SEVERAL ADDRESSES.

Address to Pastors,	122
“ Churches,	130
“ Parents who are Professors,	137
“ the Baptized,	144
“ the unbaptized,	155
CONCLUSION,	163



INTRODUCTION.

INTIMATE AND MYSTERIOUS CONNECTION BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN—DESIGN OF THE TREATISE—STATEMENT OF GENERAL POSITION.

THE relation which exists between parents and children is perhaps the most sacred and indissoluble of any upon earth. Children inherit not only the possessions, but generally, in a greater or less degree, the honor or disgrace, the constitution and propensities, the diseases and advantages of those from whom they directly but mysteriously derive their existence. "Bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," they are objects of the strongest affection ; and the toil and solicitude of parents is often directed more earnestly to their offspring, than to their own good.

The closeness of filial and parental relations is recognised by the laws of civil society, and of God.

Our children are so identified with ourselves, as to be considered the natural recipients of our social blessings and disadvantages. Among many ancient nations, punishments adjudged to the father were inflicted almost of course upon his household, and children were treated as rebels or assassins, whenever a parent was condemned for treason or had embued his hands in human blood. So in the administration of God, not only as promulgated in the second commandment, but as manifested in his providence, by daily occurrences, "the iniquities of the fathers are visited upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him"—while his mercy is shown unto many generations "of them that love him and keep his commandments."

Why the destinies of parents and children are so involved in each other, it may not be easy, and it is not necessary for us fully to determine. It must be conceded as matter of fact—and it is only with the fact that we are now concerned—that under the divine administration a man's offspring are singularly identified with himself, insomuch that when our first parents fell, they involved the whole human race in the evil consequences of their guilt; and whenever God has made a covenant with such distinguished and faithful servants, as Noah, Abraham, and David, he has generally ordained a perpetuation of blessings to them by conferring the same upon their posterity.

A remarkable instance of good to be enjoyed by children on account of eminent parental faith, is found recorded in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. "I


will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee." This is the language of Jehovah to an aged and beloved patriarch who had left all to follow him. The whole passage, which stands as context to the words rehearsed, is worthy the earnest and prayerful study of all who acknowledge the authority of Jesus, in expounding the writings of Moses, and of all the prophets, and the Psalms, as having important reference to himself.

This covenant not only indicates the intimacy of relation which exists, in a moral and religious respect between parents and children—but is supposed to extend its benefits to all the spiritual posterity of Abraham; i. e. to all who resemble him in respect to faith, and also in an important sense to the children of true believers forever. We receive it, as containing the foundation principles of a public church organization—and as the magna charta of our spiritual privileges to the remotest day.

It is the writer's design to present a Biblical exposition of the question, How are the young children of believers to be considered and treated in reference to church-membership. All reasonings derived from ecclesiastical history, and human authority, will be excluded from the discussion, not as unimportant in themselves, nor as inconclusive on the subject presented, but as too indirectly appropriate to the question, "What saith the Lord." But information gathered from the word of God, explanations adapted to

throw light upon its meaning, and any conclusions legitimately deduced, with appropriate circumstances, will be considered as coming within the limits which the word Biblical is intended to mark out. When the leading principles of the treatise have been established, some greater latitude of remark may be allowed in further illustrating and enforcing them.

The position to be maintained is briefly this. The baptized children of professing Christians are strictly speaking members of the church, and with exceptions, made necessary by their incapacity and their personal character, should be treated in other respects as such. They are not of course members by profession, nor are they members in full communion, nor are they in complete standing. Still they are truly members of the church; they are entitled to its prayers, to a christian education, and an affectionate supervision; they are standing candidates for full communion, and are to be received to the table of the Lord as soon as, but not before, they give evidence of possessing the requisite knowledge and faith, and are prepared to take upon themselves the baptismal obligations by a public profession of religion.



CHAPTER I.

PROOF OF THE DOCTRINE OF INFANT CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP.

SECTION 1. *Abrahamic Covenant—Circumcision exchanged for Baptism—Distinction between Church-Baptism and the Baptism of Proselytes.*

THE doctrine of infant church-membership is derived from the Abrahamic covenant as follows :—

1. The visible church on earth had its commencement as a publicly organized body with Abraham, and, with some modifications has preserved its identity to the present day.

2. There is strictly speaking but one church ; there never has been but one general, regularly constituted visible church in the world. For though the kingdom of God anciently dwelt in many families, and the patriarchal ancestor was the priest of his own household, it does not appear that there was any religious institution, sufficiently catholic in its character, to be dignified with the name of church.

3. This one church, beginning with Abraham, has existed under two dispensations or organizations, corresponding to different states of society and degrees of light enjoyed.

4. It is however the same body under the christian dispensation, that it was under the Jewish, preserving its fundamental principles, though with such alterations in its constitution as either were explicitly made by Christ and his apostles, or such as circumstances rendered necessary.

5. Now under the old dispensation infants were included, by divine command, with their parents as members of the church. They must therefore be included as church-members under the new dispensation, unless there is some express command to the contrary, or some peculiarity in the nature of the case which has the force of a command. But it may be safely affirmed, that there is neither statute, nor circumstance, which excludes the young children of believers from the christian church. They are therefore to be recognized as members of it.

The above conclusion, though inferential, necessarily follows from the principles assumed. We proceed to examine, therefore, such of these principles as might otherwise be controverted.

1. The church, under both dispensations, is one and the same church.

In the first place, it has one and the same covenant, viz. that which was made with Abraham, and is recorded at length in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis, in which covenant God promises to be the God of

Abraham, and his seed after him, in their generations, forever, and by accepting the conditions of which Abraham pledges himself,—by implication at least,—to be ever the faithful servant of God, and to bring up his children and his posterity, as far as the influence of his person or his character may extend, to be the willing and obedient subjects of the Most High.

That this covenant, called in Genesis an everlasting covenant, *was* the covenant of the christian church from the first, and secured the blessings promised to Abraham, both to his immediate posterity, and to all gentile believers, to the remotest ages, is sufficiently apparent from the assertions of St. Paul in the third chapter of Galatians and elsewhere. We are distinctly assured that Abraham's faith was the ground of his acceptance with God, that all believers in after ages, resembling him in faith, were to be recorded among his children—that by the *seed* of Abraham, the rightful heirs of the promise, we are to understand, primarily, Christ, and secondarily, all true believers as connected with Christ—"For if ye be Christ's," says the Apostle, "then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."

Moreover, it is affirmed, as if to preclude all objections to this view, arising out of the national institutions of the Jews, that this covenant, this fundamental principle in the constitution of the church, was so confirmed of God in Christ, that it can never be disannulled, nor changed. Taking precedence of the Mosaic institutions, 430 years in respect to time, the *law*, as that term was understood by the Jews, is to

be considered as strictly subsidiary to the promise. It was introduced on account of the wickedness of mankind, for the preservation of true religion until the time of Christ, and to prepare the world for his coming. Nor did Moses abrogate the covenant or allow it to be forgotten. Under God, he was in one sense the founder of the Jewish nation. He prepared the Hebrew code of civil government, and for the *sake of the church*, united church and state. But the promises made unto Abraham and his seed are ever held forth, as at the foundation of the Jewish Theocracy, and the imperishable charter of peculiar privileges. See for one instance among many, Deut. 29 : 10—13. All that was peculiarly Mosaic in the organization of the church, may be considered, either as the natural developement of the Abrahamic principle —“I will be your God, and the God of your seed; and ye shall be my people”—or as means adapted to secure such developement. The superstructure may be repaired, or even removed, but the *foundation* standeth sure.

The sentiments advanced are corroborated by the recollection that the Abrahamic covenant, is in *point of fact*, the one great principle on which the one great church is and has been established, down to the present day.

What is a profession of religion, as understood by Christians generally, but a public acknowledgment of God in Christ as our God, with the understanding on our part, that by this act, sincerely performed, and in the way of divine appointment, we are accepted and

recognized of the father, as his own peculiar people, who if faithful to our obligations may expect peculiar blessings upon ourselves and upon our children? Whatever our opinions respecting the subjects of *baptism*, must we not agree in this, viz. that the mutual engagement, “I will be thy God, and ye shall be my people, and, Thou shalt be our God, and we will be thy people,” is *the* engagement, the covenant of the church in all ages, and under all varieties of organization? If so the church under the new dispensation has the same covenant which it had under the old, and in fact as it has had from the first existence of the church as a public body, in the world.

2. Though the *seal* of the covenant has been changed, the thing signified has always remained the same. Circumcision, the initiatory rite under the old dispensation, is declared to be *a seal of the righteousness of faith*, and, is not baptism, in like manner, a seal of the righteousness of faith, under the new? Both are visible representations of the divine promise, first made to Abraham, “the father of believers,” and from him, through Christ, to all mankind, that *believers shall be justified by faith*.

Not only is the interpretation of these *seals* under both dispensations the same, but as *signs*, they both have the same meaning, being used to express the necessity of spiritual cleansing, in order to acceptance with God. That baptism is intended to indicate the necessity of spiritual cleansing, none, it is presumed, will deny. Circumcision was designed to convey the same idea. Compare such passages as these; Deut.

10 : 16—"Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart ;" 30 : 6—"The Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul that thou mayest live ;" Jer. 4 : 4—"Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your hearts, ye men of Judah"—with the New Testament interpretation of the rite, Rom. 2 : 28, 29, "Neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh—circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God." Circumcision and baptism therefore are only different methods of signifying the same thing. Under both dispensations, you enter the church, on the same principle, though the mode of illustrating or representing that principle has once been changed. The essential spiritual import of this initiatory ordinance is imperishably permanent, from the days of Abraham to the present, from our own times, down to the remotest ages of the world. Therefore, as the church covenant has always been the same, so the sign and seal of the covenant have been essentially, i. e. spiritually the same from the beginning.

3. St. Paul, in the 11th of Romans, virtually affirms, and conclusively proves the identity of the church under both dispensations. It is one stock or tree, from which certain bad branches, meaning the unbelieving Jews, were broken off, and other scions, or believing gentiles, were grafted in. The newly converted gentiles are warned against any spirit of

exultation over the rejected Jews, for, says the Apostle, "If some of the branches be broken off, and thou being a wild olive-tree, wert grafted in amongst them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree. Boast not against the branches; but if thou boast, THOU BEAREST NOT THE ROOT, BUT THE ROOT THEE."

4. Moreover, the final recovery of the Jewish people to reconciliation with God, and to the enjoyment of covenant blessings is distinctly foretold. When that event takes place, they are to be gathered, not into a new church, but into *the old*, though now existing indeed under a new organization. The olive-tree remaining the same, those branches which were cut off, and cast out, will be grafted in again, not into another, but into their *own* olive-tree; in which respect they will have some advantage over the gentile nations, the latter being grafted contrary to nature from a wild olive, while the former, being simply restored to the good tree from which they were taken, will grow the more naturally upon their native stock.

Thus it appears that the Jewish and Christian branch of the church have both the same covenant; the initiatory rite in both means the same thing; and St. Paul has declared both the same church. The church of God, therefore, is and ever has been one and only one forever. It is his kingdom on earth. Nor can its identity be destroyed by the fact, that some of the children of the kingdom have been cast out, "and many have come from the east and the

west and the north and the south, and have sat down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God." Indeed it is as clear that we have one and only one church in two dispensations, as that we have one and only one Bible in two testaments.

This church underwent some alterations, after the coming of Christ. He abolished certain observances, some of which being introduced by Moses, upon the junction of church and state, as aids to the civil government, were so exclusively Jewish, as to be inappropriate and unmeaning to other nations, and others of them being merely shadows and types *realized* in himself, were no longer of any use. Among other things, he changed the initiatory rite from circumcision to baptism, baptism being better adapted to the world at large, more in accordance with the mild spirit of the gospel, and that expansive benevolence, which was about to throw its broad shadows over all nations, giving exclusive privileges neither to Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, but making them all one in Christ.

But here it should be more distinctly inquired, does baptism take the place of circumcision? It does. Both are *seals* "of the righteousness of faith;" both are *signs* "of the circumcision of the heart." And in Col. 2: 11, 12, St. Paul distinctly recognizes the fact, that baptism represents "the circumcision of Christ," i. e. christian circumcision, or "the putting away of the sins of the flesh." Or, as the argument is more fully stated by Dr. Wor-

cester, "Circumcision under the former dispensation signified the necessity of a regeneration, or renovation, of the heart by the Holy Spirit ; baptism under the present dispensation signifies the same. Circumcision was formerly a seal of the righteousness of faith ; baptism is now a seal of the same righteousness. Circumcision was formerly a token of God's gracious covenant with his people ; baptism is now a token of the same covenant. Circumcision was formerly a mark or badge of solemn dedication ; baptism is now a mark or badge of the same solemn dedication. Circumcision was formerly an appointed pre-requisite of admission to the church of God ; baptism is now an appointed pre-requisite of admission to the same church. In a word, baptism is of the same import, and of the same use in the church under the present dispensation, as was circumcision under the ancient."

It thus appears that the initiatory rite was changed from circumcision to baptism.

Other changes were also made ;—for example, the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh day of the week to the first, called the Lord's day, since, though "great to speak the world from naught, 'twas greater to *redeem* ;"—the Aaronic priesthood was abolished—Christ having become himself priest forever after the order of Melchisedec—and the christian ministry set up ;—and many of the ceremonial distinctions between clean and unclean, having answered their design, were abandoned. But none of these changes

could destroy the identity of the church. They only extended to the cutting off some branches, while the stock remains the same. Thus, Massachusetts was Massachusetts before the American revolution as well as afterwards—though its new condition and relations required some modifications of its institutions.

But here it must be remarked, that no modification, express or implied, was ever made by Christ and his Apostles, in reference to the privileges and duties of parents, as entitled and required to introduce their young children into the same fold of covenant protection with themselves.

It follows that as such children were included with parents, as members of the church, under the first dispensation, they must, of course, be included with them under the second.

Personal Belief essential to Adult but not to Infant Baptism and Church-membership.

The principal objection to this view is the following:—As baptism is the only initiatory rite of the christian church, *belief* being essential to baptism, is essential to church-membership.

To this we have two answers.—1st. There is a broad distinction between church-baptism, and the baptism of proselytes or adult persons converted from the world. It is in reference to the latter, that the Scriptures insist upon a personal faith, as an essential qualification for baptism, saying, “If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest.” The Apostles

went forth, under the great commission, to bear the gospel tidings to the world, to disciple the nations, introducing them into the school of Christ, by his appointed ordinance, organizing them into churches founded upon the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief corner-stone, and building them up in all the principles of the new institution. It was their first business to convince the world of sin, to announce the Messiah as the offered Savior of mankind, and urge repentance and faith as essential to salvation. The badge of discipleship was baptism. Hence the exhortation *believe* and be baptized, as though personal faith was essential to baptism, as indeed it was for the persons to whom the apostolic message was immediately addressed. But it does not follow, that, when parents had been converted, and had thus become the spiritual children of Abraham and heirs of the promises, and had received the appointed sign and seal of the covenant, viz. baptism, their children should be excluded from any participation in those blessings of church-membership, which had heretofore been accorded to them in connection with parental faith, ever since the patriarchal age. We should expect, therefore, to find *belief* insisted on as essential to baptism, even though upon profession of belief, baptism was administered not only to the believer himself, but *to all his straightway*. In accordance with this opinion, we find the Apostle, enumerating the *household* of Stephanas, among the very few whom he baptized at Corinth. Nor was the idea, of thus receiving children, on the ground of parental qualifi-

cations, at all foreign from the thoughts and habits of these early preachers, who were Jews. In just this way, converted heathen had always been received, with their families into the ancient church. Belief in Israel's God was the essential pre-requisite to admission. But when a converted gentile, renouncing idolatry, had made acknowledgment of the God of Abraham, and received upon his own person the seal of the covenant, his children were immediately circumcised, and enrolled with the parent, as heirs of covenant blessings, in common with the Jews. Thus, in the introduction of proselytes into the church, *personal* faith is essential to admission—but being received, having now become church-members by baptism, their children are henceforth the children of the covenant, the children of the church. As such they are entitled to the initiatory rite, which when performed constitutes them also members of the church.

2. A second answer, though involved in the first, may be more distinctly stated as follows. Allow that belief was an essential pre-requisite to baptism, it was also, and equally the essential pre-requisite to circumcision. Both are “the seal of the righteousness of *faith*.” Circumcision certainly was, for so the Scriptures expressly affirm; and yet circumcision was applied to infants; nay the believing Jew was commanded, under most fearful comminations, to place the sign of the covenant upon his children. So baptism, being “a seal of the righteousness of *faith*,” is to be administered to the believing parent, and his little child. Thus, though baptism is now the only

introductory rite, to church-membership, the children of believers are not disqualified, through want of personal faith, to receive its administration.

It follows then that as the church under the old dispensation certainly included infants, and as nothing appears to the contrary in the teachings of Christ, or in the necessities of the case, the church under the new dispensation must include infants also.

SECTION 2. *The doctrine of Infant Church-membership derived from our Savior's treatment of Children in reference to his Church and Kingdom.*

We shall be brought to similar conclusions with the foregoing, by an investigation more directly exegetical. How did our Saviour treat children, in reference to his church and kingdom?

In discussing this question, there is an important preliminary fact which deserves attention. Our Saviour, himself a Jew in respect to his human nature, educated amidst Jewish customs and influences, introduced into the Jewish church, by circumcision, when only eight days old,—being also the omniscient Son of God,—instead of pronouncing any sentence of exclusion upon infants, or intimating any suspicion of their possible disqualification for church-membership, under the new dispensation, seems to have taken special pains to impress the disciples and all beholders, with a sense of the deep and tender interest, with

which he regarded them, in reference to the kingdom he was about to set up.

There is especially one passage which bears upon the subject of infant church-membership, with great force, and is therefore entitled to careful examination. Mat. 19: 14. "But Jesus said, suffer little children (or *the* little children, as it is in the original) and forbid them not to come unto me, for *of such* is the kingdom of heaven."

In order to understand the Saviour's meaning, inquire, first, what is meant by the phrase *kingdom of heaven*? These words, as used in the New Testament, do not always, nor even generally intend *heaven*, in the common acceptance of the term. Heaven contains no unworthy nor imperfect members; but the kingdom of heaven consists of a mixed community; foolish virgins among the wise, tares among the wheat, good and bad in the same net. It is that kingdom out of which the angels at the last day shall gather every thing that offends. It is the kingdom in which the ambitious disciples were desiring pre-eminence. It is the kingdom which Christ came to establish on earth, and which, being finally perfected, shall continue forward beyond death and the judgment, in an eternal heaven. The only visible presentation of it is *the church*. To say, "upon this rock will I build my church," is much the same as to say, here is the foundation stone of my kingdom.

Our second inquiry is, who are to be the subjects of this kingdom? Or rather, as it will contain some

unworthy, uninvited members, who does Christ designate as *properly* belonging to it? He mentions in the text before us two classes, the little children who were brought to him, and such as are like them, or rather one class including both, viz. all persons of this description. That he intends to include the children themselves, with those who are compared to them is evident—for,

1. It can hardly be supposed that those who resemble such children are entitled to membership, *because of that resemblance*, while the children themselves whom they resemble are excluded. At all events, under all the circumstances, such a mode of speaking, would be peculiarly liable to mislead, and should not be attributed to the Saviour without sufficient reason.

2. The Saviour's *treatment* of these children implies a recognition of their title to membership in his kingdom. He was not only exceedingly displeased with the disciples for rebuking those that brought them, saying, "Suffer the little children to come, and forbid them not," but, by prayer and the imposition of hands, he signified to the bystanders, that these children, though some of them infants, and all of them probably very young, were yet capable of receiving, either immediately or prospectively, spiritual blessings. And not only so, but by an act of religious consecration, he hallowed and blessed and set them apart for himself, saying, at the same time, *of such* is the kingdom of heaven.

3. The *reason assigned* by our Saviour for receiving these children implies a recognition of membership, in his kingdom. *Why* must they be allowed to come ; why must the parents be gratified in their desire that Jesus would consecrate and bless them ? *Because*, says he, (FOR) the kingdom of heaven is composed of *such* persons as these. If he had intended simply to say, that adult persons of an humble, affectionate and childlike disposition, were to be considered members of his kingdom, in such a declaration we should have a *fact* affirmed, but it would not be a *reason* for the reception and consecration of the children. If the resemblance, implied in the words *of such*, were merely a resemblance of "disposition and affection, *that*," says Matthew Henry, "might have served as a reason why doves or lambs should be brought to him," it certainly is not a reason why the children should be blessed, and by the laying on of hands consecrated to God.

Finally, we think that the Greek, *τοιουτων*, *of such*, implies both the persons compared and those to whom they are compared. The English reader may satisfy himself by reference to a few passages. Mat. 18 : 5, "And whoso shall receive *one such* little child in my name receiveth me." Now this child, as appears from the connection was *little believer*, and therefore most certainly is included with those to whom it is compared. Moreover, St. Luke says, in the parallel passage, "Whosoever shall receive *this* child in my name receiveth me." For the use of the word *τοιουτος* in other connections, see Mark 4 : 33, "And

with many *such* parables spake he the word unto them," i. e. with these parables and many that are like them. John 4 : 23, "The Father seeketh *such* to worship him," i. e. such as true worshippers, including of course the true worshippers themselves. John 9 : 16, "How can a man that is a sinner do *such* miracles," i. e. these miracles now witnessed and such as are like them. In several other instances the word is used in the same manner, nor am I apprized of any opposing usage. It seems necessary, therefore, to suppose the Saviour to have recognised these children, thus brought to him, *as themselves members of his kingdom*.

Now from Luke 18 : 15, it appears that these children, thus received as members of the kingdom, were some of them at least *infants*. It is evident also that these infants were the children of believing parents, for they brought them to Jesus in faith, that he might bless them. Christ then says, "Suffer *the* little children (for the original, as already observed, employs the article) to come unto me, and declares them members of his kingdom." From this, it is natural to infer, that all such children, in other words all the little children of believing parents, being consecrated to Christ by faith, and in the way of his appointment, are to be considered members of his kingdom.

But this conclusion is something more than an inference. While the words *of such* manifestly include the children thus presented to Christ, it cannot, of course, exclude other children of similar condition. *Τοιούτος* is a demonstrative pronoun, and designates a

class. How far this class extends, whether to all children, and even to all adults who in humility of disposition resemble them, it is not necessary for our present purpose to decide. It evidently extends—and this is far enough for the argument—to all children *of the same age and circumstances* as the children in question, i. e. to all the infants and young children of believing parents, who bring their offspring, in faith, to Christ, for his blessing—to all the children of parents, to whom “pertain,” says Mr. Henry, “the privileges of visible church-membership, as among the Jews of old. *The promise is to you and to your children. I will be a God to them and to thy seed.*”

Nor is it any objection to this interpretation, that we must all “receive the kingdom of heaven *as a little child,*” in order to admission. For how did these children receive it, as its privileges were conferred upon them by the Saviour’s words? Undoubtedly, with humility and trustful affection, without self-seeking or ambition. In this way adults must receive it, or not at all.

Similar remarks may be made respecting Mat. 18: 3, and parallel passages: “Except ye be *converted* and become as the little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” By conversion, in this place, we are not to understand, spiritual birth, for in that respect the disciples of Christ were converted already, but conversion from a particular state of mind, viz. from an ambitious desire of pre-eminence, to a childlike humility. In this respect, it was essential

for the disciples to become like children, in order to a worthy membership in Christ's kingdom.

It appears, therefore, from the foregoing considerations, especially from the usage of *τοιουτων*, *of such*, what is also evident from the nature of the case, that, not only the children noticed in Mat. 19, but all children of similar condition—in other words all the little children of believing parents, when consecrated to Christ by faith, and in the way of his appointment are to be considered members of his kingdom. And if members of his kingdom, then certainly no good reason can be given, why they should not be members of his church, which is the only visible presentation of his kingdom, which in fact *is* his kingdom.

We are yet to inquire, more distinctly, *why* such children are enrolled among the subjects of the kingdom of heaven.

1. It is not on account of their *innate goodness*, for this supposition would not only contradict the great fact of the fall of man and the consequent vitiated condition of human nature, so abundantly affirmed in the Scriptures, but also the teachings of Christ, who speaks of children as *lost*, even in those very passages which assert the necessity of an humble, childlike spirit, as *one* of the essential qualifications for the kingdom of heaven. See Mat. 18 : 1-14. This little child, though now, as it appears, a little believer,*

* N. B. The children, in Mat. 19 and parallel passages, seem to have been infants, brought to Christ by others; those in Mat. 18 and parallel passages, young believers, accepted on their own account. This distinction will assist to explain the passages.

is distinctly recognised as among those originally lost ones, who stood in need of and had received the Saviour's saving grace. And if this child, "if one of *these little ones*," then of course all children must be considered as naturally in that state, which demands the intervention of Christ, for their salvation, and not *naturally*, and of their own right,* members of his kingdom.

But if the privilege actually bestowed, in Mat. 19, upon some very small children, was not bestowed on account of their innate goodness, it must have been on account of the faith of those who offered them.

We confess that Christ did not *baptize* these children, for he never baptized any one. Nor did he admit them to the church, for under the old dispensation, being Jews, they were already members, and the church under the new dispensation was not yet organized. But he declared them members of his kingdom, and that too probably on account of the faith of the parents; and, if members of his kingdom, then fit subjects of *church-membership*, whenever the church

* To avoid any misunderstanding, the writer desires to state explicitly his confident hope of the salvation of all children who die in infancy. This confidence is founded, not only upon the goodness of God, but, respecting the children of the church, upon *covenanted* mercy, and the recognition of such children by Christ as members of his kingdom. The hope of salvation for *all* children, is cherished on the ground, that *grace* abounds over *sin*; so that the second Adam, having repaired, by redemption, the ruins of the first, has made the free gift available, through the spirit, to the justification of all who neither wilfully reject it, nor lose its benefits by voluntary continuation in sin. The salvation of all children is, however, a matter of inference more than of promise; that of the children of believers, a matter of explicit promise as well as inference.

should become under its new organization the visible presentation of his kingdom.

In short, we understand Christ to say, that children offered to him in faith, by believing parents, are to be recognised as *his*. They belong to his kingdom, and when that kingdom comes to have a church organization, they will rightfully belong to his church ; for what is the church, but the members of Christ's kingdom organized according to his appointment. And if this be so, then the children of believers were intended by Christ to be members of his church.

SECTION 3. *The great Apostolic Commission, considered in reference to Infant Church-membership.*

The great commission is announced by our Saviour in these words: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in (into) the NAME of the FATHER, and of the SON, and of the HOLY GHOST: teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo I am with you alway even unto the end of the world."

This commission, considered in connection with the circumstances under which it was given, goes to confirm the doctrine of infant church-membership, not because children are expressly named as the proper subjects of baptism, but because they *are not expressly excluded*; for how could a Jew always accustomed to infant church-membership, under the old dispensa-

tion, suspect, without authority, its impropriety under the new ?

. But let us examine the words of our Saviour more minutely. Go, says he, and teach all nations. It is not necessary to inform the biblical student that the original, here translated *teach*, is altogether a different word from that translated teaching in the last verse, nor that the meaning of the word in the first instance is not literally to teach but to make disciples. "Go make disciples of all nations, baptizing, and instructing them." As soon as the import of our Saviour's words was fully understood as extending to the whole gentile world, the apostles must have supposed themselves commissioned to go forth, and make proselytes, baptizing them and their children, and building them up by complete instruction in the most holy faith. For—

1. It is to be remembered that these original teachers were *all Jews*. They had been accustomed to infant church-membership, by the invariable usage of their church. The initiatory ordinance was uniformly administered to the children, not on account of personal faith, but of parental connection. Nor was it unusual for them to witness the introduction of gentile proselytes into the Jewish church ; in which case the infants and children of the family were received by the same introductory rite. Suppose that the apostles had been sent forth into the gentile world to make proselytes to the Jewish religion, and the Saviour had said, "Go, disciple all nations, circumcising, and instructing them in all the commandments

and ordinances of Jehovah," could there have been a question, whether children were to be received with their parents? Certainly not. On the same principle, we must believe that baptism was administered, as a matter of course, to the offspring of believers in connection with themselves. True, according to their Jewish notions, we might expect to find them baptizing none but males, were it not for the express information that this new initiatory rite was extended also to the other sex. Acts 8: 12. They were baptized both men and *women*." Gal. 3: 27, 28, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

2. This view of the manner in which the apostolic commission must have been at first understood is corroborated by another fact. The baptism of proselytes was nothing new in the Jewish church. The immediate descendants of Abraham became children of the covenant, by circumcision; but it was required of Gentiles, that they should be also ceremonially cleansed by baptism. It is stated as a historical fact, and probability is altogether in its favor, that the children of these proselytes were uniformly baptized. Now, under these circumstances, it is morally impossible, that any Jew, having the Saviour's commission, could have hesitated a moment as to the propriety of administering baptism to the little children.

But here it will be inquired, does baptism constitute those who regularly receive it, members of the christian church? For it must be shown not only that

children are proper subjects of baptism, but also that baptism visibly unites its orderly recipients to the church.

In maintaining the affirmative of this question, two things should be distinctly premised and understood. First, the validity of a general rule is not impaired but rather confirmed by a few extreme cases which may be adduced as exceptions to it. Suppose that under some extraordinary circumstances an unbaptized person might lawfully be admitted to the Lord's supper, and be recognised as a member of the church, it will not follow that unbaptized persons, in *ordinary* circumstances, should be considered, on mere profession of faith, church-members. Or, suppose that, in certain cases, a baptized person, upon whom it may never be necessary to repeat the ordinance in order to its validity, is yet *not* a member of the church,—as where a person has been excommunicated,—it will not follow that baptized persons are not generally and properly introduced to the church by baptism. A king may come to be a king in spite of the irregularity of his coronation—or one may lose the inheritance, by personal disqualifications, to which a lawful conveyance entitles him—but this does not destroy the validity of *deeds* in general, nor lessen the importance of a public investiture in order to the full enjoyment of royal prerogatives.

Second. When it is affirmed that baptism constitutes its regular recipients church-members, it is not intended to deny, that the children of believers, according to the doctrine of the New-England fathers,

are in some sense *born* church-members. They are indeed members by *designation*, but not members by *initiation*. They are born in the covenant, but are not entitled to the blessings of the covenant, except prospectively, until they receive the sign and seal of the covenant. The engagement has been made, the writings drawn, but the instrument would not be valid, if the persons authorised to act in the case, should refuse to sign and seal it. The circumstance of christian birth may give them a right to admission, and, the intention to do for the children after the custom of the law, may secure them the privileges of their birthright, till opportunity for visible initiation is afforded—but if all suitable opportunities for this purpose should be voluntarily neglected, the subjects of such negligence must lose their claim for covenant favors. Wherefore, it is said, in Gen. 17, that the child who is not circumcised, at the appointed time, though born in the covenant, shall be cut off from the privileges of his birthright. For these reasons, circumcision and baptism are spoken of as initiatory ordinances, as acts visibly uniting their recipients,—the first under the old dispensation, and the second under the new,—to the church. They are acts without which,—though entitled to admission, and, prospectively, for a season, to covenant blessings—they are not visibly constituted members. Thus the president of the United States is president elect, immediately upon the designation of the people, but is not authorised to act in that capacity until he is invested with

his high powers by the ceremony of inauguration, and the oaths of office.

These things being premised, the question now returns, does baptism constitute those who receive it members of the christian church? It does. For,

1. It has been already proved that circumcision was the introductory ordinance of the Jewish church, and that baptism under the new dispensation has taken the place of circumcision under the old; from which it follows, that baptism is the introductory ordinance to the christian church.

2. *Admission by baptism* appears to have been the invariable apostolic custom. The commission was, go forth, disciple the nations, *baptizing*, and then instructing, and building them up in Christ. The first converts, three thousand in number, joined the church, on the day of their conversion, by baptism. And ever after, new converts, both Jews and proselytes, “were *baptized into one body*.” Nor is there the slightest intimation of any other mode of admission to the christian church.

3. The formula of baptism itself implies that baptism is *the* initiatory ordinance. We are to baptize the disciple *into* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

The propriety of translating the original words *εἰς το ὄνομα*, into the name, instead of, in the name, has been fully defended by Dr. Dwight, in the third volume of his *Theology*, and by many judicious commentators. Without dwelling upon the fact, that “*εἰς* is never used in the New Testament, in any

other instance to designate any thing done in the name or by the authority of Christ, but that in the only case, where in the name of Christ is joined with the verb baptize, Acts 2 : 38, the preposition is *ἐπι*, instead of *ἐν*," the English reader may satisfy himself, by reference to a few corresponding passages. 1 Cor. 12 : 13, "For by one spirit we are all baptized *into* one body." Gal. 3 : 27, "As many of you as have been baptized *into* Christ have put on Christ." Rom. 6 : 34, "Know ye not that so many of us, as were baptized *into* Jesus Christ were baptized *into* his death." It is said in 1 Cor. 10 : 2, That the fathers of the Hebrew church were baptized (*ἐν*) "into Moses," i. e. into the religion of Moses in the cloud and in the sea. "In the name," says the learned Whately, "is a manifest mis-translation, originating, apparently, with the Vulgate Latin, which has 'in nomine.' " *

Instead of *in* the name, we must translate, baptizing *into* the *name*, etc. Now the name of God, as here used, is but a Hebraism for God himself. Baptism into his name then, what is it but a visible restoration of alienated man?—a solemn, visible introduction into the presence, the fellowship, the church of God?

Rosenmuller has some remarks upon this passage, which, as corroborative of these views, seem worthy of translation.

By the original word rendered *teach* in our version, is meant "to make a disciple, or introduce a person

* Whately's Kingdom of Christ, page 56, note.

in an orderly manner into the christian church. The name of disciples properly belongs not only to those who have been fully instructed and confirmed* but to those also who are in a course of training and are yet to be confirmed. For since the apostles were not ignorant that the children and infants of proselytes from other nations must not only be called proselytes, and be circumcised, but also baptized, (as Wetstenius has abundantly proved,) it could not have entered their minds, that children and infants must be expunged from the catalogue of disciples, or be denied baptism, unless such persons had been excepted and excluded by the express words of Christ, *which we now read.*

“The ends of baptism are various. But according to its nature, it is especially a mark of profession, and an introduction into the church. The phrase into the name of the Father is a Hebraistic pleonasm for into the Father. To be baptized into any one, is to come under obligations by baptism, to his worship and profession of religion instituted by him. Thus Paul denies that any one was baptized into his name. 1 Cor. 13 : 15, i. e. had entered into an engagement to him, as if he were the author of the new religion. We are therefore baptized into the name of the Father, i. e. into the profession and worship of God, who revealed himself in the Old Testament ; into the name of the Son, as the true Messiah, who appeared in human flesh, and by his miracles, doctrine, resurrection, as-

* *Congregational* confirmation is an open profession of faith.

cension, proved himself to be the true Messiah ; into the name of the Holy Spirit, who makes gracious application of spiritual benefits to us. Or more briefly, we are baptized into the Father as the author of the new religion, into the Son as the Lord of the new association, into the Spirit as its guide and helper."

It appears then, from the comprehensive nature of the apostolic commission ; from the fact that the initiatory sacrament was extended to women, but was not restricted to adults ; from the habits of thought and customs in which the original teachers had been educated ; from the use of baptism as introductory to church-membership ; and from the peculiar and solemn form of words by which we are visibly received as professors of Christ's religion ; it appears, nay it is a necessary conclusion, that when we come into the church ourselves, we ought to bring our children with us, and give them up in faith unto him who "leads his flock like a shepherd gathering the *lambs* in his *arms*, and carrying them in *his bosom*."

SECTION 4. *Infant Church-membership recognised by the Apostle Paul and the Corinthians.*

The doctrine of infant church-membership may be deduced from 1 Cor. 7 : 14, "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband ; else were your children unclean, but now are they HOLY." It appears from these words that the holiness of children, thus

conditioned, was an acknowledged fact in the Corinthian church. This acknowledged holiness of the children is adduced as proof, that a certain degree of sanctity or sacredness, was thrown around the unbelieving parent, in consequence of his or her connection with a believer. And this latter fact, viz. that an idea of sacredness was associated with the unbeliever, when thus conditioned, is a reason why persons thus united in marriage should not separate, on the ground that one has become a Christian and the other not. But all the reasoning is based on the acknowledged fact that the children of the parents in question are *holy*.

To avoid the conclusions necessarily deduced from this fact, some translate the words ἀγία and ἀχάθαρτα, legitimate and illegitimate. But how is it possible to twist the passage into such an interpretation. For if we substitute legitimate and illegitimate for holy and unclean,—we must, in order to be consistent, substitute legitimized for sanctified. Then the apostle will reason thus: “It is an acknowledged fact that the children of parents one of whom is a Christian and the other not are legitimate. This proves that the believing parent legitimizes the unbelieving parent—and this is a reason why they should not separate.” But is the idea of one parent legitimizing the other parent sense or nonsense?

But further, what could the apostle mean by saying that such children are legitimate. He must use the word either in a civil or a religious sense. Now we know that in a civil or legal sense the unbelief of the

parent did not affect the legitimacy of the child. He must use the word then in a religious sense—but religious legitimacy, if the phrase has any meaning, must signify that the child is the rightful heir of the parents' christian privileges—in other words, that the child is holy in the sense soon to be explained.

There is a still more decisive argument against the interpretation in question. It is that the term ἅγιον, though a word of frequent occurrence, no where else means legitimate. I have consulted Donnegan, Schleusner, and Wahl as edited by Robinson, neither of whom give any such meaning to the word. Schleusner seems to have examined it with great thoroughness, and though he finds it used in no less than ten or twelve varieties or shades of meaning, he has adduced no passage which seems capable of such an interpretation, but in almost every instance ἅγιον may be translated *holy* without exposing the careful reader to mistake.

These considerations appear to be decisive against such an unnatural exegesis of the passage. We are prepared then to ask, what does the apostle mean, when he says, that the children of believers are holy and the children of unbelievers are unclean. We have only to look at those words as often used in the Bible, in order to obtain their meaning. The terms clean and unclean, not only signify good and bad, but professors and non-professors, persons in covenant with God and persons not in covenant. The members of the Jewish church were called holy, though it contained many wicked men—and all the world

around was called unclean, though it contained some true worshippers of God. The Jews were called holy, because God had entered into covenant with them and had set his mark upon them;—their children were called holy, because they in like manner had been circumcised and introduced into the church. When the apostle addresses this language to the Corinthians, he must mean, that the children of believers are holy in a church sense—belonging to the people of God, the acknowledged heirs of the parental covenant, entitled to the initiatory rite, which is baptism, and by it constituted members of the church. It is on this principle that we administer baptism to children, when only one of the parents is a professor. It is because the apostle has declared such children to be holy, that is, holy in respect to church-membership, entitled to the covenant made with Abraham and his seed, and thus to be considered members of the church. This accords with the interpretation given to the words *νυν δε αγια εστιν* (now are they holy) by Schleusner, *jam vero habentur membra ecclesiae Christianae*, but now are they members of the christian church.

SECTION 5. *Additional considerations affecting the question of Infant Church-membership.*

1. It appears that the apostles baptized by *households*, just as the Jews circumcised by households. Compare the directions given to Abraham in the 17th

of Genesis, with the baptism of Lydia and all her household, and of the jailor and of *all his* straight-way.

2. If the apostles had denied church-membership to the infants of believers, then the conversion and baptism of a Jewish parent would have been attended, virtually, with the excommunication of his children. Under the old dispensation they were members of the church; they had been initiated by circumcision; they were the children of covenant, wearing its seal upon them. But after the institution of baptism, as the initiatory ordinance, circumcision was discountenanced. "Neither circumcision availeth any thing nor uncircumcision." In a short time, the bloody rite is no longer received among believing and enlightened Hebrews, as the seal of God's covenant of grace. The Jewish nation has ceased to be the church. When the converted parent makes profession of his faith in Christ, he renounces all confidence in ancient ordinances and ceremonies. He now belongs to another church, "for the old has vanished away." Unless his children are entitled to church-membership by baptism, they now cease to be church-members at all. The parent, instead of having superior privileges, as was promised under the gospel, is deprived of one of the most precious that he formerly enjoyed. God's Israel is now the christian church—the Jewish father enters it, but his children are not permitted to come. In the rejection of this old and cast off dispensation, they are rejected, and must

henceforth be considered as "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise." What an obstacle such a rejection of the children must have been to the conversion of the Jews? What would the Judaizing teachers have said to it? Is it probable that the whole matter would have passed off without one word of controversy?—that we should hear of no difficulties or disputes arising from such a radical innovation? But not a word of the kind is recorded in the New Testament. On the contrary, the apostles re-uttered the same sentiment, on the day of pentecost, which the prophets and ancient saints had always taught, saying, "The promise is unto you and to your children." We must infer, therefore,—what might be naturally supposed from the nature of the case,—that the gospel did not restrict the privileges of parents, with regard to their offspring, but that the church in receiving the believer received his children also.

Thus it appears to be God's good pleasure to receive under the broad canopy of his covenant, not only the father and mother professing faith in Christ, but all the members of their family over whom they have a parent's control. The language of the gospel is like that addressed to Noah, "*Come thou and all thy house into the ark.*"

SECTION 6. *Foregoing Principles illustrated in a General Review of the Constitution and History of the Church.*

Let us now, for the sake of a more definite understanding of some of the principles advanced, take a brief review of the constitution and history of the church, as recorded in the Scriptures.

God made a covenant with Abraham 430 years before the giving of the law at Sinai. This covenant promised great and peculiar blessings *to the posterity* of Abraham, on account of the father's faith; perhaps we should say rather to *a* posterity of Abraham, from generation to generation forever. The pledge was not given to all his posterity, for while the patriarch had many children, it was written in "Isaac shall thy seed be called." And again, respecting the two children of Isaac, the elder having sold his birth-right, it is written, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." The sons of Jacob, however, were all heirs of the promises and enjoyed peculiar benefits until the time of Christ. Now Christ was the crowning gift of all those blessings which God had covenanted to bestow. When the Jewish nation rejected Christ, saying, "his blood be on us and on our children," and persisted in unbelief after repentance was preached, and salvation offered to them, they, by these acts, cut themselves off from the further benefits of the covenant;—for these further and more spiritual benefits were all to descend to them

through Christ. But they having thus rejected Christ, the advantages promised through him descended of course to the *posterity* or rightful heirs of Christ. But who are the posterity of Christ? Or what does the prophet mean when he says, "He shall see his seed?" And again, "Thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the gentiles." By the seed of Christ, we understand his spiritual posterity, that is, all who believe in him throughout the world, according to another part of the promise made to Abraham, saying, "In thy seed, i. e. Christ, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." It is in this sense and this only, as the spiritual seed of Christ, that we who now believe in Jesus, are the children of Abraham, and the heirs of the blessings promised in the patriarchal covenant. Thus the descendants of Abraham, in the line of Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve patriarchs, constituted the visible church on earth, down to the rejection of Christ. They were the good olive-tree planted by God, and continually watered by his grace. But when they had rejected Christ, invoking his blood upon their heads, and persisting in impenitence after the gospel overtures had been made to them,—thus in fact renouncing their covenant,—they were forthwith rejected of God, and with the exception of a small remnant, were virtually excommunicated. The bad branches of this tree, or the unbelieving Jews were cut off, leaving Christ as the *stock*, on which henceforth all the remaining branches are to grow, and into which all believing gentiles, called wild olive trees by

nature, were, or are to be engrafted, and, contrary to what we witness in the field, are to partake of the nature of the root or stock and become fruitful branches in Christ. When the fulness of the gentiles shall have come in—when Christ shall be acknowledged Lord of the world,—and the nations of the earth generally become members of his church—then the Jews which at that time shall remain unbelieving are to be converted, and these olive-trees called good by nature, because they are of the stock of Abraham, are to be engrafted once more into their own olive-tree, that is, with the gentiles, into Christ—and so the church, still retaining its identity, will remain united under one head, down to the end of time. Thus we have the outlines of the origin, history and consummation of the church.

From the first, God required that a mark, of his own appointment, should be placed upon his own acknowledged people, upon all who were or were to be *successively* his, by inheritance from generation to generation forever. This mark was at first circumcision. But after the rejection of the unbelieving Jews, and the adoption of the believing gentiles in their place, this mark was changed from circumcision to baptism, which signifies the same thing. So that baptism is to be applied to the infants of believers, according to the command of God, that his mark should be set upon Abraham and his heirs forever, and all such infants, on receiving baptism, become lambs of the same fold with the parent flock, infant members of the one great church.

CHAPTER II.

NATURE AND DEGREE OF INFANT CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP.

HAVING thus shown that baptized infants are, strictly speaking, members of the church, it is next in order to inquire into the nature and degree of that church-membership.

SECTION 1. *Peculiarity of this Relation.*

Here let it be remembered, what has been already proved, that circumcision and baptism are the only initiatory rites which have ever existed in the church. The passover under the old dispensation, and the Lord's supper under the new, were appointed not as introductory to the church, but wholly for other purposes. There is but one way of coming into the christian church, and that is by *baptism* into the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. This is the only rite which "signifies and seals our engrafting into Christ." The water is an emblem of

spiritual cleansing, and a pledge of acceptance through faith; and the baptismal formula is intended for a visible restoration to divine favor. The meaning of the ceremony is always essentially the same. It is performed in the same manner upon all adults and upon children, and implies in the general the same things. It unites the recipients of it, both parents and children, visibly to Christ, and makes them members of his church. If Christians are not made church-members by baptism—as far as any thing appears to the contrary in the New Testament, they are not made church-members at all. Unbaptized adults are baptized indeed on profession of belief. But this profession is never the introductive act, but an act preparatory to that which is introductive, viz. baptism.

It is freely conceded, that according to our congregational forms at the present day, in order that we be received as members in full of this or that particular church, we must publicly covenant with God, and also with the particular church which we propose to join. But our covenant with God is nothing more than what is implied by baptism, and our covenant with a particular church, besides being an engagement “to walk in love and christian-fellowship with God’s people, generally (which engagement is made virtually by baptism) is also an *introduction* to the *rites* and *privileges*, not to say *peculiarities*, of *that particular church*. Were you to say, I believe in Christ with all my heart, and then to receive baptism, you might be entitled to all the privileges of a church which required no more, and thus, as all must allow, be a

member of God's church. But to be entitled to the peculiar privileges of some other particular church, you must covenant to walk with its members according to certain expressed principles of agreement. Separating then what is absolutely essential from what is obviously factitious, it is evident, that baptism on profession of belief constitutes the person who receives it a church-member, just as under the Jewish dispensation a gentile became a member of the Jewish church, by professing his faith in the Jewish religion, and receiving the rite of circumcision.

Now infants are admitted, as we have seen, by the same door, but *not exactly on the same principle*. They come in with the parents, as Isaac did with Abraham, on account of the parents' belief. The parents covenant for them. They are the children's sponsors or endorsers. And upon the parents giving their names as surety for the children, which they do, virtually, on presenting them for baptism, the child is received, not on account of its own goodness, but because it is the will of the good Shepherd to gather the lambs into the same fold with the parent flock, and set his mark alike upon them all. Baptized children then are in the same enclosures with the parents and are equally members of the church long before they make any personal profession of faith. Properly speaking, the question can never come up, whether they shall join the church? They belong *already*, and a profession of religion with them is simply their own most hearty acknowledgment of this fact, and of the obligations it implies. Having arrived at a situa-

ble age, and having sufficient religious knowledge to act understandingly, if they now give evidence of personal faith, they should be invited to ratify the doings of their parents by an open profession. A public acknowledgment of Christ, under these circumstances, entitles them to participate in the sacrament of the Lord's-supper, and to be considered members of the church in full communion. If they refuse, through conscious want of the requisite qualifications—or if, applying for the privileges of full communion, they should be rejected, on account of manifest want of faith, they would not be immediately un-churched by this refusal or rejection, but should rather be looked upon as members walking in darkness and in violation of baptismal vows. They are still members, they can never cease to be members except by actual or virtual excommunication.

Some minds may be so fully possessed with the idea, that joining the church necessarily admits the individual to all the privileges of the church, as to find it difficult to distinguish between *real* membership and membership in full communion. But are there not sometimes infant kings, who are not as yet invested with all royal prerogatives?—real kings, but not in complete standing? In the same orchard there is often ripe and green fruit upon the same branches—both are fruit, though the latter may never come to maturity. In most institutions of learning, we have several classes, and exclusive privileges for advanced students. So in the Saviour's school. His youngest pupils are truly members, though they have not yet

“attained to the stature,” nor to all the privileges
“of perfect ones in Christ.”

SECTION 2. *Children of the Church subject to its supervision.*

To what extent are baptized children properly subject to the watch and discipline of the church? This is a delicate and important question. It may, however, be intelligibly answered. Being church-members, they are to be treated in all respects like other church-members, *so far and only so far as the peculiar circumstances of their age and condition will allow.* This should be remembered as the great and guiding principle in all that is to follow.

The church then is to watch over its children as faithfully as over its adult members. The baptized children are the peculiar objects of its hopes, its instructions, and its prayers. When such children fall into open sin, the church should mourn over, pray for, and seek to reclaim them.

In doing this they must exercise great gentleness and discretion. Any thing like *espionage*, or officious intermeddling, or attempts at undue restraint in things unessential, should be scrupulously avoided. The young have rights and liberties as well as the old. When it is said, that they are in some sense the subjects of discipline in the church, it is intended rather that they are entitled to the *affectionate supervision* of adult members in full communion.

In cases of unchristian conduct,—as when a baptized child neglects public worship, or falls into a habit of using profane and indecorous language, or becomes a loungeur about taverns, or exposes himself to the suspicion of any other immorality—it may be expedient to approach the child, generally, in the first instance, through its believing parents. If such parents are really Christians they will do all in their power, when properly informed of their children's faults, to bring them to repentance. If they fail and can do no more, let them ask the prayers of the church, or if the church is numerous, and the offence is not of a public nature, let them open the anguish of their spirit to a few select members, obtain their prayers, and take their advice. Perhaps at this stage, it may be expedient for the pastor, or some one or more of the brethren, at the request of the parents, or on their own responsibility where the parents neglect their duty, to confer with the offending child and seek by every christian motive, and especially by his covenant relation to God, to bring him to repentance. If they succeed, then this faithful but kind supervision redounds to the glory of God, and proves of incalculable advantage to the repenting child. The ends of discipline are answered by this gently restraining, reforming, and even through grace, converting influence of the church.

But if no good impression can be made upon some wayward youth ; if, having arrived at an age capable of acting for himself, he commits and continues in open and flagrant sins, pursuing a course of conduct

which amounts to a renunciation of church-membership, and this too after suitable means have been used for his recovery, and little or no hope of amendment remains, there could be no impropriety in removing him from the church.

But this is a point which requires the exercise of sound discretion. Some lawful things the apostle teaches are inexpedient. Perhaps, on account of the hardness of men's hearts, as society is now constituted, it might be wiser, if any, once lambs of the fold, should fall into what seems irreclaimable sin, and thus renounce their baptismal covenant, silently, and by informal consent to consider and treat them as aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, rather than separate them from the church by any direct excommunicating act. The ends of discipline are the reformation of offenders, the honor of the church, and the protection of those who "think they stand." Possibly these ends may be quite as well obtained,—in the case of young persons, members of the church by baptism, *but not in full communion*, and therefore not looked upon, by those without, as examples of Christianity—by silent withdrawal, as by public reprehension.

One thing seems certain, there is no necessity for hasty exclusions. We may wait for indications of repentance, while by prayer and all judicious means we seek to secure it, one year or ten or even under some circumstances, till the individual is excommunicated by death. In the mean time such persons should be regarded, not as heathen and publicans, but as wanderers from the good Shepherd's fold. They are

the prodigal sons of the church, for whom unwearied intercessions should be made, and to whom messages of mercy should be often sent, and of whose return strong hopes should be cherished, until we see them standing in the church, and saying, "I have sinned."

Moreover, if children were rightly educated as members of the church, it is believed that cases requiring severe discipline would be as unfrequent as they now are among adults.

Be this as it may, there should be no such withdrawal, from any person who *sustains a good character*, and manifests a serious regard for the obligations of religion. The reason is obvious, and may be given in the words of Pres. Edwards, in answer to the question, "Why these children that were born in the covenant are not cast out, when in adult age they make no profession?" "They are not cast out," says he, "because it is a matter held in suspense, whether they do cordially consent to the covenant or not; or whether their making no profession does not arise from some other cause; and none are to be excommunicated without some positive evidence against them."

Some of the foregoing remarks are predicated on the supposition that parents will earnestly endeavor to bring up their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and will rejoice to avail themselves of all the good influences of the church and of all needed aid of the pastor and brethren, to secure the object. But what shall be done in case parents

should wilfully neglect these baptismal duties, and connive at the irreligion of their children, or allow them to go to destruction, only saying with Eli, "nay my sons, for it is no good report that I hear?"

In answer to this question, it may be observed, that parents can scarcely commit a greater sin than, in contempt of God's holy covenant and their own solemn vows, to allow their children in immoral practices, or to grow up in ignorance of duty and truth. For such an offence church-members should be dealt with according to the general principles of church discipline, which seek the repentance and reformation of those who have gone out of the way. But beyond this, the church have a duty also towards the baptized children of such untoward professors; it is by kindness, by expostulation, and by all the powerful motives of the gospel, if possible to reclaim and save them. All baptized children are committed to the sacred guardianship of the church. They are given by this body or rather by God himself, more immediately in trust, to parents. But if parents neglect their duty, the church itself is under obligations to perform it.

As a guiding principle on this whole subject let the church *never lose sight* of its children, nor cease to consider them candidates for full communion, nor fail, by prayer, watchfulness, instruction, and other appropriate means, as far as they have power, to prepare them for the Lord's supper. The duties enjoined may be performed by parents, pastors, or individual members, or by the body in its associated character.

Only let the person or persons more immediately responsible see that they are not neglected. Nothing can discharge the adult members from these obligations, but the death or excommunication of the children, until they make profession of their faith, or are transferred in an orderly manner to another church.

If the child has occasion to leave the parental roof, and fix his residence in some other city or town, it may not be necessary to give him a letter of dismissal and recommendation, as in the case of adults, but it is important that he should carry with him testimonials of character and church-membership, and be regularly introduced to the pastor and brethren of the church with whom he is intending to worship. It then becomes their duty, according to the principles of fellowship adopted by congregational churches, to love, watch over, and cherish him as a lamb of their own fold. Thus when a young person removes to one of our large cities, instead of being exposed to all its temptations, as an irresponsible stranger, who, unknown and unwarned, will almost necessarily make shipwreck of faith and character—he is brought immediately under the restraining influences of christian society, and into the enjoyment of all the means of grace. He does not pass out of the knowledge of the adult members of the church in which he was born. They are able to make inquiries and obtain information at any time respecting him, while they among whom providence has cast his lot will feel themselves authorised and required to guard the purity of his

morals, seek his temporal happiness and highest eternal good.

If at any time a baptized person proposes himself for public profession, in some other church than that to which he properly belongs, testimonials of character, and a certificate of church standing should be required as always indispensable to an orderly reception. Thus in all cases, the children of the church are to be kept under its sanctifying influences and supervision.

SECTION 3. *Other Privileges of Baptized Children.*

There are peculiar privileges which the Great Head of the church has been pleased to bestow upon the children of the covenant, as members of his church.

They are not only entitled to a christian education, to the love, guardianship and prayers of God's people, but they are brought by their baptism into a most endeared and sacred relation to the Father. They belong, as we have already shown, to Christ's own fold. The broad firmament of his love arches over and bends around them. God has entered into an engagement with the parents to be their God and the God of their baptized children. He has set his own *token*—the badge of discipleship upon them. He has made them recipients of that ordinance which, in the language of the Catechism, "doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ, and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace." He promises to

bless the children—to bless in a special manner faithful and earnest endeavors for their eternal good. To be sure, he does not promise their salvation, unconditionally. But he does promise to be a God of blessings to the baptized. The thoughtless youth may never know till he sees all in the light of eternity, how much restraining and special grace, and how many temporal mercies, have been bestowed upon him, because he is constituted by baptism a child of the covenant which God has made with his people, to be a God to them and to their seed. By placing his *mark* upon such children, he has designated them for *his*. Inviting all men to come to him, by repentance, he calls upon the baptized especially, saying, “My son give me thy heart.” It is as if he had said, “On account of my covenant with your father and mother, I have received, consecrated, marked, and set you apart, to be educated as, and to *be* one of my disciples, ‘Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.’ I am ‘beforehand with you’—I have conveyed to you a sure title to a heavenly inheritance. I have set my own hand and my own seal to the deed. Your parents have subscribed, for you, to all the requisite conditions. Had you been taken away in infancy, you would have been received to inherit the promises. But you have lived now to an age capable of acting for yourself—the covenant will be null and void at the judgment seat of Christ, unless you acknowledge it as your own. You must subscribe to the conditions for yourself—those conditions are a

personal belief in the Lord Jesus Christ—you have only to give in your name, by the exercise of faith, and the covenant shall never be disannulled.” Surely then baptized children derive great and precious privileges from their church-membership—nor can they renounce them, by continuing in sin and unbelief without a corresponding increase of guilt and danger. The King of kings has taken them into his family—he adopts them, conditionally, as his children, educates them with his children, intending that when they arrive at a suitable age, if they are found to possess appropriate qualities, they themselves shall be the princes and nobles of his royal house.

They can indeed despise and renounce their adoption if they will. Baptism is not necessarily a saving ordinance. “The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that doth administer them, but only by the blessing of Christ and the working of the Spirit in them who by faith receive them.” If that blessing is rejected and that spirit resisted, baptism may only serve to aggravate the condemnation of a ruined soul. So on the other hand, the unbaptized may be adopted on profession of faith, and take the places of those children of the covenant who despise their birthright. But after all, the difference between the two classes, in respect to *privilege*, is incomparably great. It is like that which existed, in the days of Moses and David, between the chosen people, and all other nations of the world. The baptized have been received as members of the kingdom,—to be educated in its

institutions, and fitted for its services,—though liable on account of unbelief to be thrust out of it. The unbaptized are not members of the kingdom, though they may be admitted by the exercise of saving faith. Thus our Saviour said and his words should ever ring in the ears of the church as an awful warning to all, “Many shall come from the east and the west and the north and the south, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God, but the children of the kingdom shall be thrust out.” This threatening of what may be done, in case of continued unbelief and sin, does not however destroy existing relations, nor diminish aught of the high privileges of sonship, nor prevent the children of the church from growing up under the wing of Jehovah’s covenant protection.

SECTION 4. *Restrictions upon Privileges.*

Baptized non-professors, though members of the church, are not however entitled to full communion, nor to the rights of suffrage in the church, nor to baptism for their children. These positions will be considered in their order.

I. Baptized persons are not entitled without personal profession *to the privileges of full communion*. They have neither the right nor the qualifications to participate with their parents in the supper of the Lord. This is a restriction upon the privileges of certain church-members, but does not annul, nor impair

their church-membership. "There are," indeed, "many members in one body, and all have not the same office." Pastors are church-members, but all church-members are not pastors. Deacons are church-members, but all church-members are not deacons. Females are church-members, but they are not invested with the powers of public speech and suffrage. So baptized children are church-members, but they are not entitled, without acknowledging their baptism by a personal profession of faith, to the privileges of full communion.

The reason of this distinction between baptism on a parent's account, and the reception of the eucharist in the same way, is obvious. Baptism is administered to the child, without the necessity of his own consent, and wholly upon the faith of his sponsors. The babe receives the ordinance perhaps in unconscious slumber—and young children, generally, without any intelligent sense of responsibility. It is something done *for* them, in which they are passive recipients, and for which their personal consent is never required and cannot be obtained. But partaking of the Lord's supper is a *personal* act—and cannot worthily be attempted without personal qualifications.

First, there must be the physical power, to eat the broken bread and drink the Saviour's cup, which power the baptized babe does not possess.

Next, there must be an intellectual ability for self-examination, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup," which ability is never found in infant years.

Finally, there must be a spiritual ability rightly to discern the Lord's body, in other words a renewed heart. It is required by the very nature of the sacrament, that children, in order to a participation in it, should give evidence of saving faith. Nor is early piety of itself *alone* a sufficient qualification for the ordinance unless the child is of age and capacity to act understandingly in the business. He must partake of the Lord's supper with an intelligent *remembrance* of Christ, with some good reasons for trusting that he does not eat and drink unworthily, with a spiritual appreciation of covenant blessings and the reception of them by faith. Infants and very young children are excluded from the Lord's table, by the very nature of the ordinance, nor can they be welcomed, until they possess both requisite knowledge and faith.

Some of these remarks will apply with equal strength to baptized adults. No one may come unworthily, nor without spiritual discernment—in other words without true godliness at heart.

As soon as they possess these qualifications, whether children or men, they will be disposed to manifest them, by a personal acknowledgment of their baptismal obligations, and an orderly profession of their faith in Christ. From this time forth, such persons, "walking worthy of their vocation," are not only members, as before, but members in full communion, and entitled to all the privileges of other professors.

In opposition to such views as these, it is sometimes said, that as Jewish children partook of the passover

without a personal profession, and on the ground of infant church-membership, so on the same principle the children of christian parents ought to partake of the Lord's supper.

1. We answer, that a degree of intelligence and faith which was sufficient for a participation in an ordinance, instituted to commemorate the deliverance from Egypt, may not be sufficient to qualify a person for the far more spiritual ordinance of the Lord's supper.

2. It may be difficult to ascertain, at what age, and exactly on what conditions, children were admitted to the passover—but the terms of admission to the Lord's table are too explicit to be misunderstood. Among these are preparatory self-examination, spiritual worthiness and discernment. Wherever these qualifications have been properly made manifest, we may welcome the persons possessing them, but no others, to all the privileges of full communion.

II. Nor ought baptized children, through adults, while they continue non-professors, to *exercise equal authority in church affairs with* professors; because they have never performed the conditions requisite to such a privilege. Thus a person may be a citizen of this commonwealth, but he should not enjoy the right of suffrage, till he has qualified himself in the legally appointed way. The qualifications necessary to the enjoyment of the church rights in question, are of course no less than those which are requisite to communion at the table, viz. a regular profession of personal faith. For why should any control the affairs

of the church who give no indication that they are personally interested in the great objects for which the church was established?

III. There is still another restriction to the privileges of baptized non-professors. They are *not entitled to the baptism of their children*. The reason why baptized persons of sober life are not cut off from the church, when in adult age they make no profession, has been stated in the words of Edwards. Nor can any injury result from permitting them to sustain their baptismal relation to the church, so long as they maintain a serious deportment, and do not renounce their early baptism by open breach of covenant or sin which corresponds thereto. For though church-members on their parents account, they cannot perpetuate irreligion in the church, by the introduction of *their children*, through baptism, until they have first made acknowledgment of their own baptism in the appointed way; in other words, until by a credible profession of faith, they solemnly avouch the God of their fathers, the Being into whose triune NAME they are baptized, to be their own God; thus standing forth like Joshua and saying, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The affirmation just made deserves the most careful consideration. It is indeed one of the most important points in this treatise, and answers one of the strongest objections to the views herein enforced.

Is it *necessary* to require evidence of personal faith, or what is commonly understood by a profession of religion, in an adult, in order to the baptism of his

children, and their orderly reception to the church? Most certainly. For if an unbelieving but baptized parent, refusing to assume his own baptismal vows, giving no evidence of any personal qualifications for the ordinance, might, superstitiously, or to promote personal estimation, claim and receive baptism for his children, and these again for their children, and so on from generation to generation, not only would a most powerful incitement to personal religion be taken away, and a holy sacrament be thus profaned, but the church would lose its spirituality, and might become, in the end, but little different, in its distinguishing characteristics, from a community of baptized heathen.

We say then, that an orderly profession of religion, by each baptized person, in successive generations, is indispensable, to a perpetuation of the privileges of the baptismal covenant. Nor is it difficult to demonstrate the proposition.

For, first, covenant blessings are promised on conditions. It is *presumed*, that being baptized, given up to God in faith, religiously educated, the children of pious parents, will at an early age lay hold upon the covenant by faith, and take upon themselves, by an open profession of religion, their baptismal vows. Refusal, or failure to perform these conditions, is a virtual renunciation of all the conditional blessings. The chain is broken, the covenant is annulled.

2. Baptism, like circumcision, is a seal of the righteousness of faith. In the case of infant baptism, it is a seal of the parent's faith, placed not only upon himself, but on his account, upon his child. If the

parent have no faith, makes no profession of faith, gives no evidence of faith, the seal placed upon his child, is a seal of that which has neither actual nor visible existence. Baptism under such circumstances is a manifest absurdity.

3. It will be readily acknowledged that no *unbaptized parent* can be entitled to baptism, *on his own account*, without a suitable manifestation of faith. "If thou believest with all thine heart thou mayest." Now certainly if an adult could not claim baptism for himself, without a profession of faith, he cannot claim it for his child, without faith—for on what principle do we baptize an infant—is it not on account of the parents' faith?

4. The very formula of baptism implies the *supposed* pre-existence of faith on the part of the parent. For what purpose does he bring his children to the baptismal font? Is it not that they may be solemnly introduced into God's house? And should not the minister say, I baptize thee *into* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?

If any one should make answer, that presenting a child for baptism is in *itself* a profession of faith. We say, in the first place, that it is not so understood, where nothing more than the silent act is required. Or, secondly, if it is so understood, and if the person has the faith this act is said to signify, he will not hesitate to manifest it, by more express terms, according to the usage of the church. So that without profession, in some orderly way, he cannot give that

evidence of faith, which entitles the child on its parents account to the *seal* of the righteousness of faith.

As the error of perpetuating church-membership, without the qualifications appropriate to church-membership, is one of dangerous tendency, and at former periods has done harm in the New-England churches, and is in fact, as already intimated, the principle objection to infant church-membership, it will be proper to show the fallacy on which it is founded.

1. It has been maintained that the children of parents in covenant, being born in the church, are church-members by birth. Of course then their children will be church-members by birth, and so on from generation to generation. Whence it must follow that in process of time infidels and Mahometans might be church-members by inheritance from some remote ancestor who was a believer. Rejecting the inference, we must necessarily reject the principle from which it is deduced.

But, in fact, the children of professing Christians, though in some sense born in the church, are not strictly speaking church-members, until they have received the appointed *token* of church-membership, viz. baptism. The original charter, recorded in Genesis 17th, is very express on this point. The covenant is broken in respect to those children upon whom the seal of the covenant is not placed. Moreover the covenant blessings are perpetuated only on conditions. The baptized parent must recognise the principle on which he became a church-member, viz. in conse-

quence of his parents' *belief*—nor can he claim baptismal privileges for *his* children, on any other ground, than his own professed or supposed belief. “Thus,” says Edwards, “the eldest sons of noblemen in Great Britain are born heirs to the honors and estate of their fathers; yet this no way hinders but they may be obliged, when they come to ripeness of age, in order to being invested in the actual possession,”—and we may add convey the same to their children—“to take the oath of allegiance; though in order to their lawfully doing it, it may be necessary they should believe in their hearts, that King George is the lawful prince, and that they should not be enemies to him and friends to the pretender.” So then the parent, born himself in the church, and constituted a member by the usual token, must, not only in order to enjoy other privileges of a person in full communion, but in order to convey the rights of church-membership to his children, take the vows of allegiance to his Maker, made for him by his parents, *upon himself*.

2. It has been also maintained that whereas it was the right and privilege of the Jews to circumcise their children and thus introduce them into the church, from generation to generation, without regard to the character of the immediate parents, therefore it must be among the rights and privileges of Christians to baptize on the same principle.

To this we answer, first. Supposing it the duty of Jewish parents to circumcise their children, even without faith, it must be remembered, that circumcision, though an introductory sacrament to the visible

church, was designed also to prevent the descendants of Abraham from corrupting themselves, by intercourse with other nations, especially by heathen marriages. As a means of preserving true religion, until the time of Christ, through a people invested for that purpose with many peculiarities, we can see a reason why circumcision might be more extended in its application than baptism.

2. It does not appear, however, that the offering of children to God, without faith, by circumcision, was acceptable, but rather the contrary. For if circumcision was required, so was love to God, obedience, *faith*; in still stronger terms. These very qualifications were in fact pre-supposed by circumcision.

3. Even if this were not so, the new dispensation is confessedly far more spiritual than the old, and would naturally require superior qualifications for its sacraments.

4. But be *this* as it may—allowing that there is some obscurity, as to the terms on which the initiatory ordinance was administered in the ancient church, the requisites to church-membership under the gospel seem sufficiently clear. Acts 16: 31. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.”

5. There is, moreover, one fact in the history of the Jews, which shows conclusively the mistake of those who maintain the right of baptized non-professors to the baptism of their infants, from the right of any Jew to make his children members of the ancient church, by circumcision. The passover is that ordi-

nance under the old dispensation, which corresponds to the Lord's supper under the new. But the man who neglected the passover, except in cases of necessity, was, in consequence cut off from the people of the Lord ; and all church privileges, both for himself and children, were taken away. From whence it would follow that those who neglect the Lord's supper—in other words non-professors—have no right to claim baptismal privileges for their children.

From these considerations, the propriety of insisting upon a credible profession of faith, on the part of a parent, before he can claim baptism for his children, is most evident—nor can the notion which demands baptism for the children of irreligious but baptized parents, on the ground of real faith, in some remote ancestor, be sustained ; though to avoid misapprehension, it may here be stated that in case of the decease of non-professing parents, professing grand-parents, if living, may on their own right dedicate the grand-child, as a child, to God, and indeed any of their posterity, or other children who are members of their household, over whom they have a parent's control, and for whose religious education they can become personally responsible.

The nature and degree of infant church-membership must now be apparent. All baptized persons are truly church-members. Between them and others there is the same general distinction as that which exists between the visible church and the world.

They are the divinely appointed candidates for the highest christian privileges. But in order to the complete enjoyment of them certain personal qualifications are requisite. Until these qualifications are manifested, they are not entitled to full communion at the table of the Lord, nor to baptism for their children, nor to the control of church affairs. Hence they are truly members of the church, but not in full enjoyment of its privileges. They stand within the precincts of the temple, though not admitted to the most holy place.

CHAPTER III.

PRACTICAL ADVANTAGES OF THE DOCTRINE OF INFANT CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP.

1. On the principles enforced, the baptized children will come to have a definite, intelligible and very interesting relation to the church. They will be less exposed to grow up and abide amongst us as a non-descript, half-christianized population, the Samaritans of Christianity, likely enough to become our bitterest enemies in the end. They will be considered a part of ourselves, as belonging to Christ's own fold, the Saviour's lambs, who can never forsake the footsteps of the flock without consciousness of sin, nor abide in the wilderness without being sought. Parents and children will no longer be perplexed with the question, "What good can infant baptism do you?" They will understand that by this initiatory rite, the subjects of it are solemnly introduced, among the number of Christ's disciples. The broad shield of covenant protection is thrown over them; they are invested with the rights of christian citizenship; they are ad-

mitted to a standing in the younger classes of the Saviour's school; they are constituted heirs of the peculiar christian blessings, with nothing wanting to full possession, but the oath of personal allegiance. If removed by death, before they are capable of an intelligent rejection of Christ, they will be received, *on the ground of the promise*, through sanctification of the spirit, into the company of "saints made perfect in light." If they are preserved to adult years, having now a visible growth upon the good olive-tree in the garden of the Lord, and the power of his own peculiar influences around them, how natural to hope for that inward union at an early age, on which vitality depends. Baptism is not to them nor to any, "a saving ordinance," but it is wonderfully preparatory to that efficacious grace which saves the soul. Thus in budding and grafting an orchard, the proper introduction of the germ or scion, ensures no fruit, but it is the appointed means, and not improbable precursor of future fertility.

2. On the principles advanced, the *act* of infant consecration assumes unspeakable importance. Baptism is not the public *naming* of a child nor a mere genteel but almost unmeaning ceremony. It is the sacred setting apart, the solemn giving up to God, of an immortal being, of whose unending existence, whether for weal or for woe, we have been the occasion, and for whose religious education we are responsible. It is the public introduction of a precious spirit into Jehovah's spiritual temple, into the NAME of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

And since the consecrated child will need that cleansing which is represented by water baptism, and since he must be born of the spirit, or, after becoming of a responsible age, and neglecting every covenant overture of mercy, be rejected, like the unbelieving Jews, or like Esau who sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage,—parents properly informed and impressed with their obligations, will be the more solicitous, *so* to give up their children in faith, that through means of prayer and instruction, the blood of the everlasting covenant may, at an early age, cleanse them from sin.

3. If baptized children are to be considered members of the church, then churches, pastors and parents will come under heavier responsibilities, in respect to them, than they have usually assumed. Pastors will perceive increased emphasis in the apostolic exhortation, “Take heed to yourselves and to *all* the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood;” and again to the words of Jesus, “If thou lovest me, feed my lambs.” The brethren and sisters of the church will the more cheerfully unite their prayers and labors and influence for the right education of the young. They will, the more naturally, make them subjects of daily and earnest addresses to the throne of grace. Nor will they consider one of the prominent objects for which churches are formed, *viz. the rearing of a HOLY SEED*, as accomplished, until they see the children generally prepared and disposed to make a public profession of

their faith, almost as soon as they are capable of understanding their condition and obligations. Parents, while they are comforted in view of promised blessings, upon their offspring, and a fellowship of faith and labor in the church on their children's behalf, will be also the more anxious to bring them up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and the more ready to combine with others to secure healthful instruction, and the exercise of salutary restraints; the whole church, especially parents, making common cause with each other, in securing the orderly training, the thorough religious education, the early piety of all the children.

4. The views of infant church-membership and instruction which have been advanced, would lead the people of God to depend more upon long-continued and patient exertions, and less upon fitful excitements. While we seek "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit," and rejoice when divine influences come down "as rain upon the mown grass, and as showers to water a dry and thirsty earth," we should be less likely to disparage those ordinary blessings which descend silently, gently, constantly, as the dew. We should be less anxious to lash ourselves and each other into periodical and spasmodic exertions—"making perhaps more haste than good speed," than to commence, and carry forward, and never retire from the work of training up the children of the kingdom for the service of the Great King. Like the husbandman, we should have long patience, and during all the season of cultivation we should labor in hope.

A steady course of *training* in the church, *relied upon* through grace, as the best means of salvation to the children, would unquestionably produce great results. Its influence would be like that of Baxter's weekly catechetical exercises in Kidderminster, transforming in a few years the character of an almost entire community. It would produce Christians of large and stable growth. Early rooted and grounded in the faith, though making slow progress perhaps at the first, the plant of righteousness, well imbedded in the soil of faith, would naturally throw out its branches with so much the more luxuriance and fruitfulness in the end. Nothing would give such stability and strength to the church as the thorough education of its children who are rising to take the place of their fathers in the direction of God's house. Let them see the foundations and view the proportions of the building, and come in themselves, not as loose stones or unsightly appendages, but as compact parts of the temple of the Lord, and the church will be better prepared to stand against the thunder-gusts and desolating influences which threaten it.

There is no stronger power over mind than education. Many errorists have understood this ; for "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." Baleful as the influence may be when an immortal spirit is reared in superstition and trained to a blind and implicit belief in the dogmas of a false religion, there can be no question that it is the duty of intelligent Christians to fortify youthful minds against evil, by a sound and practical

knowledge of gospel principles, "that they may continue in the things they have learned, knowing of whom they have learned them."

The sufficiency of the Scriptures and the rights of private judgment in the interpretation of them, are among the fundamental doctrines of protestantism. But no orthodox reformer ever protested against that great Abrahamic and christian principle, that religious parents are responsible for the religious education of their children. The opinion which has found favor in some quarters, that the minds of children should be preserved unbiased, uninfluenced, untaught upon subjects of religious belief, till they become of age to act for themselves, finds no countenance in the Scriptures, nor does reason sustain it. To say nothing of the danger of leaving young minds to encounter temptations, without the assistance of "an overcoming faith," is it possible to preserve them from evil, unless by pre-occupying them with good? The question is *not* between a religious education and *no* education; it is between a religious education and an irreligious education. Neither errorists, nor a depraved heart, nor bad companions, nor "the adversary of souls," will suffer them to remain uninstructed. Who then is to take the responsibility of pre-occupying the mind? God places it upon christian parents and the church. It is their duty to assume it, and by wisdom, painstaking, and prayer, educate souls for the kingdom.

This is indeed a slow and laborious process. But *durability* is an offspring of time—"he that believeth shall not make haste." Like a tree of slow growth,

like an edifice long in completion—permanence of character depends much upon the time and labor expended upon its formation.

5. A church thus constituted has not only strength and stability in its present members—but has also the seeds of *perpetuity* in itself. It may ingather multitudes from the world, it may hold forth the precious words of life and help to found numerous churches in foreign countries, or in the region of its own abode, but its principal hope, in respect to future generations, will be, through the blessing of God, in itself. The children are the nursery of the church, and as the trees of the old orchard go to decay, it is theirs to take their place. Thus the church, having christianized a community, preserves what she gains. “Instead of the fathers are the children.” The stream of life deepens and widens in its *natural* flow, while tributaries from abroad, not necessary to its progress, yet go to swell the wave of salvation, and bear it with more power over the world.

6. The principles of infant church-membership here laid down, will help to increase the attachment of children for their parent church. Instead of being left, as they grow towards maturity, to wander over the wide world of *isms*, to be picked up and proselyted by whichever may find them, or to go from sect to sect, “carried about by every wind of doctrine,” having “no rest for the sole of their foot,” they will have a *home*, a *holy* mother church indeed, on whose bosom they were nurtured, under whose protection

most of them will delight to dwell, into whose hospitable mansion even the storm-tossed prodigal will rejoice eventually to return.

7. These principles of church-membership, properly applied, will be among the most powerful means of grace.

Under the influence of a thorough religious education, attended with the fellowship of prayer and a strong faith in the promises, the blessings of the covenant may be expected to descend early and plentifully upon the children of the covenant. 1st. There will be the restraining power of religious principles and impressions which are among the best safeguards in temptation and among the strongest barriers against flagrant sin. 2d. There will be the ever softening influences of christian truth and emotion wonderfully preparing the way for saving grace. 3d. There will probably be much of the Spirit's special presence, which so generally attends the faithful teachings of *his* doctrines whose *words* are spirit and life. 4th. There will be an increased consciousness of christian obligation, more like that which the adult disciple feels, when he remembers that "the vows of God are upon him, and in whatever world he may be fixed will abide upon him to eternity." The reflection, "I am a baptized child, a member of the Saviour's flock, wearing the mark which he himself hath set upon me ; if I apostatise and perish, I must go down to destruction, from the very mountain of holiness, with guilt of no common aggravation upon me ; if I neglect to appropriate the great and precious promises of God,

by a personal profession of faith, I virtually renounce the God of my fathers, interrupting the flow of covenant blessings intended for many generations, making myself an Esau who has sold his birth-right"—these and such like considerations, impressed by the Holy Spirit, must naturally have an almost invincible moral power upon the mind.

Especially will these principles be felt as means of grace, at that period when a personal profession, by the baptized, is naturally looked for in the church. The question comes distinctly before the mind,—Shall I now, being of responsible age, acknowledge, or shall I reject the God of my fathers, or, continuing undecided, hazard all my interest in covenant blessings? If it were expected that between the age of twelve and sixteen, or soon after, each child of the church would come forward with a prepared heart, to own the Saviour before men, or to take the personal responsibility of saying, "Go thy way for this time," how serious would the reflections of such a person naturally be. Suppose it were customary, as in Calvin's church, at Geneva, even to this day, to institute two or three regular inquiries into the moral and spiritual condition of the children, and especially into their personal qualifications for sacramental privileges, by careful examination first, of all who are twelve years of age, receiving such and such only to the table of the Lord as give evidence of saving, though perhaps feeble faith; second, of the same persons, as many of them as still remain non-professors at fourteen years of age, and again at fifteen or sixteen,—

what a solemn period would these three or four years of their early life naturally become. How deep an interest would pastors and all adult professors be likely to feel in these young candidates for full communion. And as the children of the church drew towards the period usually assigned for personal profession, what could exceed the anxiety and tender importunity of good parents and pastors, that the long deferred blessings might now at length be obtained. Under such circumstances, if ever, we might expect to find "wrestling Jacobs and prevailing Israels."

8. In this connection, it may be suitable to say a word, as to the influence of these sentiments upon the purity of the church. It will ever be necessary, as it now is, and always has been, to guard against the reception of unspiritual persons to the table of the Lord. Nothing but a credible evidence of piety, and visible profession of faith can qualify, even baptized persons, for the privileges of full communion. It is alike true of them and of all others, that a work of grace upon the heart, a renewal by the Holy Spirit is an essential pre-requisite, to a worthy participation in the sacramental feast. The wisest guardians of the church may be deceived, they often are deceived, as to the qualifications of candidates proposed for admission. The danger is not removed by the principles of church-membership herein enforced. In times of declension, if these should occur, it is not improbable that some chaff would be gathered with the wheat. But would other sentiments, and an opposite practice, preserve from the evil. Let the ecclesiastical his-

tory of New-England for the last fifty years—let the present condition of many churches in different denominations answer. With the careful preparatory instruction contemplated, how much better fitted would our youthful candidates for full communion probably be, than many now are, who, under the influence of some temporary excitement, are brought forward and without time for instruction are pressed into the church. Among the former we might reasonably anticipate, that instead of many sudden and great apostacies, or those irregular fervors which sometimes blaze forth so disastrously in our day, faith would grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength, till amidst the feebleness of outward infirmities, they shall come to rejoice constantly, and without a doubt, in the God of their childhood, in the God of their fathers, in the God of their children, in their own God forever.

These remarks are not intended in disparagement of any wise efforts to evangelize the world. They seek the solidity, perpetuity, purity, of existing churches—while they allow us to labor zealously, and rejoice heartily, when many are added daily, from without, of such as shall be saved.

Finally. The children of the church, recognised and instructed as such, would grow up to maturity with the seeds of contemplation and enjoyment within them. Let them commit to memory the commandments, the Lord's prayer, the apostles' creed, the confession and covenant of the church to which they with their parents

belong ; let their minds be filled with select passages of Scripture, with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, not in "formless jumble," but according to some instructive system ; let them be made fully acquainted with the nature of baptism, of their own relation to the church, of the vows which are upon them, of the peculiar privileges proffered to their reception ; let them be thoroughly indoctrinated, not only by some such formula of faith as the Assembly's Catechism, but more directly out of the word of God ; let all that is taught be thoroughly explained, and impressed upon the memory by constant repetition, till all the great principles of faith and practice and church polity are thoroughly understood, and fairly written out, yea stereotyped upon the heart, and a broad foundation will be laid not only for further improvement in knowledge and holiness, but also for great and ever increasing enjoyment. God's truths dwelling in the regenerated soul, will be like the strings of a harp, ready to give forth sweet tones whenever the breath of the Spirit passes over them. Such minds will be full of thoughts and objects of contemplation. Instead of becoming restless the moment the social excitement of a religious meeting has gone by ; instead of going to every variety of religious tenet and extraordinary movement, saying, "who will show us any good ?" they will have a feast at home, a source of happiness within—which, if it does not afford religious ecstacy, will shed over the soul that "peace of God which passeth all understanding." Such persons will rever-

ence and love truth in all its parts and bearings, and not feel that the luxury of tears and transporting emotions is the only good which religion bestows. Keeping God's commandments, prepared by previous discipline, to descend deeper and still deeper into the mysteries of infinite love; they will live in God's world "with his glory round about them." The teachers of religion,—instead of having many in their flocks who wish to be pampered with high seasoned dainties, who almost lose the service when there is nothing stirring, nothing addressed to their own narrow experience—to whose perverted tastes much of the New Testament, taken text by text, would present no subject of special interest,—would have a race of indoctrinated puritans, to whom any truths which the Holy Spirit was interested to reveal, would be precious as gold. But what can we expect when early education is neglected? That which was not sown in spring—can it be found upon the fields in autumn? It is the misfortune more than the fault of some Christians, that the topics of spiritual entertainment and profitable attention are so very few. They were not early rooted and grounded in first principles, nor have they been convinced of the fact, that the things already learned, are but the small beginnings of an immeasurable knowledge. They have no idea of the noble proportions and boundlessness of truth. Standing beneath its magnificent porch-way, they cannot believe that vast aisles and pillared arches of the great temple have never yet been opened to

their view, nor have patience with those who bid them knock and knock and strive for admission.

Whatever may be said of the present age, it is the business of the church, to prepare the coming generation of her sons for active zeal in the propagation of religion, and for steady personal advancement in all the wonderful works of God.

Nor let it be said, that the duty of instruction may be performed with equal hope of success, upon those who are without, as upon those who have been received within the precincts of the church. The church is the temple of the Spirit. Peculiarly favored are they, who are called to learn wisdom and piety beneath the overshadowing glory of his immediate presence.

In any attempts to lay the foundations of immortality in these young members of the church, assistance may be derived from an institution peculiar to our times ; I mean the Sabbath-school. Let ministers oversee and provide carefully for its interests ; let churches appoint their best members for its instruction and the superintendence of its affairs ; let reports of its progress and condition be frequently presented to the body of professors ; let it be *the institution of the church*, and never left, as it sometimes has been, to any and all who might volunteer to direct its movements—to be called forth perhaps in a body by any errorist, who, without consultation with its rightful guardians, is pleased to extend a deceptive complaisance towards it ;—let all who teach

be filled with spiritual wisdom, prayer, and the Holy Ghost—let them labor both for time and for eternity, and in a few years a generation of Christians may be expected who would do honor to an apostolic age.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GENERAL SENTIMENT OF NEW ENGLAND CONGREGATIONALISTS AND OTHER REFORMED CHURCHES ON THE SUBJECT.

THAT the principle maintained is no innovation, but belongs to the congregational system, and to the reformed churches generally, as well as to the doctrines of the Apostles, an abundance of testimony might be adduced to show. It is presumed that none will deny this assertion as far as it respects the episcopal church, the Lutheran churches, and the presbyterian churches in Scotland and on the continent. But some might question, before examination, whether the doctrine under consideration is among the fundamental principles of ecclesiastical polity in the purest churches of the new world. Whether it belongs to *congregationalism*, a few passages from high authority will make evident.

The first is taken from "New England's Memorial, by Nathaniel Morton, Secretary to the Court for the jurisdiction of New Plymouth." In giving an account

of the organization of the first church in Salem, in 1629, he says: "The two ministers there being seriously studious of reformation, they considered the state of their children together with their parents; concerning which letters did pass between Mr. Higginson,"—one of the ministers of Salem,—“and Mr. Brewster, the reverend elder of the church of Plymouth; and *they did agree in their judgments, viz. concerning the church-membership of the children with their parents, and that baptism was a seal of their membership*; only when they were adult, they being not scandalous, they were to be examined by the church-officers, and upon their approbation of their fitness, and upon the children's public and personally owning of the covenant, they were to be received unto the Lord's-supper. Accordingly Mr. Higginson's eldest son, being about fifteen years of age, was owned to have been received a member together with his parents, and being privately examined by the pastor, Mr. Skelton, about his knowledge in the principles of religion, he did present him before the church when the Lord's-supper was to be administered, and the child then publicly and personally owning the covenant of the God of his father, he was admitted unto the Lord's-supper; it being there professedly owned, according to 1 Cor. 7: 14, that the children of the church are holy unto the Lord as well as their parents."

This passage clearly shows the opinion and practice of the first two churches founded in New-England, viz. the church in Plymouth and the church in Salem.

There was a little work published in London in 1643, entitled, "Church Government and Church Covenant Discussed—in an Answer of the Elders of the several churches in New-England, to two-and-thirty Questions, sent over to them by divers ministers in Old England." The fifth question is stated as follows:—"Whether do you admit children under age as members of the church together with their parents, and in the admission of their parent or parents; so as thenceforth they may partake of all church privileges (being otherwise fit) without any other personal profession of faith or entering into church covenant, when they shall come to years—and how long do you count them under age?" To the first clause of the first question, the New-England elders give an explicit answer: "Infants with us *are* admitted members *in* and *with* their parents, so as to be admitted to all church privileges of which infants are capable." As to the question, whether such persons should on coming of age be admitted to the Lord's-supper and all other church privileges—"This," they say, "is a question of which, by reason of the infancy of these churches, we have had no occasion yet to determine what to judge or practice one way or the other." They then proceed to give it as their opinion, that all such persons ought to enter into church covenant for themselves, before being allowed to participate in the higher church privileges. "For otherwise we do confess, children that are born when their parents are church-members, are in covenant with God even from their birth, and their baptism did

seal it unto them. But notwithstanding their birth-right, we conceive there is a necessity of their personal profession of faith, and taking of the church covenant when they come to years, for without this it cannot so well be discerned, what fitness is in them for the Lord's table and other church privileges, as by this means it might."—"Wherefore in this point we cannot but fully approve the practice of the reformed churches, among whom it is the manner, as Zepporus writeth, to admit children that were baptized in their infancy to the Lord's table, by public profession of their faith and entering into covenant."

Our next witness is the Cambridge Platform. It was framed by the synod of 1648. The men who composed that assembly were among the most distinguished inhabitants of the new world. Some of its leading spirits were Wilson and Cotton of Boston, Norton of Ipswich, (afterwards Cambridge,) Elliot of Roxbury, Shepherd of Cambridge, Mather of Dorchester, Allen of Dedham, Rogers of Rowley, and Partridge of Duxbury." They drew the writing, as Gov. Winthrop asserts, "*according to the general practice of the churches.*" It was afterwards presented to the churches for their consideration and approval—and by the action of the next general court, was finally made the ecclesiastical law of the commonwealth. It was adopted as the basis of church government in all the New-England colonies, and may properly be denominated the original constitution of the Pilgrim churches.

“The matter of a visible church,” says the Platform,* “are saints by calling.” By saints we understand, 1st. “Such,” etc.—here describing the characteristics of adult professors ; 2d. “*The children of such*, who are also holy.” Again, “The like trial is to be required *from such members of the church as were born in the same*, or received their membership and were baptized in their infancy or minority, by virtue of the covenant of their parents, when being grown up unto years of discretion, they shall desire to be made partakers of the Lord’s-supper ; unto which, because holy things must not be given to the unworthy, therefore, it is requisite that these as well as others should come to their trial and examination, and manifest their faith and repentance by an open profession thereof, before they are received to the Lord’s-supper, and otherwise not to be admitted thereunto. Yet these church-members *that were so born*, or received in their childhood, before they are capable of being made partakers of full communion, have many privileges which others, not church-members, have not ; they are in covenant with God, have the seal thereof upon them, viz. baptism ; and so if not regenerated, yet are in a more hopeful way of attaining regenerating grace, and all the spiritual blessings both of the covenant and seal ; they are also *under church watch*, and consequently subject to the reprehensions, admonitions, and censures thereof, for their healing and amendment as need shall require.”†

* Cambridge Platform, Chap. III, 1, 2.

† Chap. III, 7.

In the year 1649, "not three months before his decease," Rev. Thomas Shepherd, "sometime pastor of the church in Cambridge, New-England, who, besides his eminent abilities, was a man of much real and living communion with God, and therefore more like to know the mind of Christ than many others," wrote a treatise expressing views upon the subject now under consideration, in full accordance with the Platform. It is entitled, "THE CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP OF CHILDREN, and their right to baptism, according to that holy and everlasting covenant of God, established between himself and the faithful and their seed after them in their generations; cleared up in a letter, sent to a worthy friend of the Author, and many years ago* written, touching that subject."—"If," says Mr. Shepherd, "the substance of that covenant (the Abrahamic) was, I will be a God to thee and thy seed, then this very covenant remains still under the gospel, it being one and the same with that; if by virtue of that covenant, the children were made *members of the church*; and hence had a church privilege and a seal administered; then the same covenant remaining the same, and in the same force and benefit, *our children* also are taken into the like *membership*."

Again, "There is the same inward cause, moving God to *take in the children of believing church-members into the church* and covenant now, to be of the number of his people, as there was for taking the

*This letter though written in 1649, was not published till 1662.

Jews and their children, for the only cause why the Lord took in the Jews and their children thus, was his love and free grace and mercy. Deut. 4 : 37, "Because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed."—So that I do from hence fully believe, that either God's love is in these days of his gospel less unto his people and servants, than in the days of the Old Testament ; or if it be as great, then the same love respects the seed of his people now, as then it did. And, therefore, if then because he loved them, he chose their seed to be of his church ; so in these days, because he loveth us, he *chooseth our seed to be of his church also.*"

In another place he adds, "Hereby God gives parents some comfortable hope of their children's salvation, because they are *within the pale of the visible church.* And if we pray for our children, why should we doubt, leaving only secrets to God, if we see them die before they reject the gospel positively,—I see no reason for any man to doubt—of the salvation of his child if he dies, or that God will not do good to his child in time if he lives. This stirs up their hearts to be more sincerely holy, and keep in with God, because of their children ; and to educate them with more care and watchfulness, because they are the Lord's children as well as theirs ; they are not common but holy vessels, therefore, let them see that they are not defiled ; and hence we find, that when God exhorts to any duty in Scripture, he oft makes this the ground of it, "I am your God ;" and hence God aggravates their sin in offering their children to Mo-

lech. Ezek. 16, "Because they were *his children*, that should have been better used."

These sentiments of Shepherd's were reiterated by the most distinguished of the clerical settlers generally. The opinions of many of them on this subject were afterwards collated by Increase Mather of Boston, and published under his direction at Cambridge, in 1675. The work is entitled, "THE FIRST PRINCIPLES OF NEW-ENGLAND, concerning the subject of Baptism and Communion of Churches; collected out of the original manuscripts of the first and chief fathers in the New-England churches; with the judgment of sundry learned divines of the Congregational way in England, concerning the said Questions; published for the benefit of those who are of the rising generation of New-England." This pamphlet contains the opinions of Cotton, Hooker, Stone of Hartford, Richard Mather of Dorchester, Partridge of Duxbury, Norton and Shepherd of Cambridge, and others. All agree, in the words of Stone, "That children of church-members have right to church-membership by virtue of their father's covenant;" or in the words of "that judicious and eagle-eyed seer," Mr. Norton, that "the children of parents in church covenant are church-members and ought to be baptized."

In 1662, by the previous appointment of the general court, a synod was holden in Boston, to consider the proper extent of baptism, and of communion between particular churches. The subject in debate

respecting baptism was whether the children of such baptized parents, as were not in full communion, might receive baptism, upon their parents owning the covenant and promising to submit to the discipline of the church? The answer was summed up in several propositions.

“1. They that, according to Scripture, are members of the visible church are the subjects of baptism.

“2. The members of the visible church, according to Scripture, are confederate visible believers in particular churches, and *their infant seed*, i. e. children in minority, whose next parents are one or both of them in covenant.

“3. The infant seed of confederate visible believers are members of the same church with their parents; and when grown up, are personally under the watch, discipline, and government of that church.

“4. Those adult persons are not therefore to be admitted to full communion, merely because they are and continue members, without such further qualifications as the word of God requireth thereunto.

“5. Such church-members, who are admitted in minority, understanding the doctrine of faith, and publicly professing their assent thereunto, not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the covenant before the church, wherein they give up themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the government of Christ in the church, *their children are to be baptized.*”*

* Hubbard's History of New-England, Chap. LXVII.

This last proposition, as we shall see, was strongly, and not without reason, opposed ; and some dissented from the doctrine that baptized children are members of the *particular* churches to which their parents belong,* but infant church-membership in some form was the general sentiment not only of the synod and the court, but of the country.

In 1679, at a synod holden in Boston, "It was put to vote, whether the assembly did approve of the Platform of Church Discipline. And both elders and brethren did unanimously lift up their hands in the affirmative, not one appearing when the vote was propounded in the negative."

The Savoy confession of 1658, adopted by the Boston Synod in 1680, thus defines the visible catholic church: "The whole body of men throughout the world, professing the faith of the gospel, and obedience unto God by Christ, not destroying their own profession by any errors everting the foundation, or unholiness of conversation, they and *their children* with them are and may be called the visible catholic church of Christ."†

The churches of Connecticut were represented in the synods of Cambridge and Boston, and with others had adopted the Platform. But desiring to introduce a system of consociation among their churches, they met in synod by themselves for this purpose, and finally, May 13, 1708, adopted not only certain principles of consociation but also the *Savoy Confession*,

* Hubbard's History of New-England, Chap. LXX.

† Savoy Confession, Chap. XXVI, 2.

“owned and assented unto” by the Boston synod of 1680, in which the church is defined as including the baptized children of believers ; and also the “ Heads of Agreement,” assented to by the presbyterians and congregationalists of England in 1690 ; in which last document they say, “ We do conceive the whole multitude of visible believers and their infant seed (commonly called the catholic visible church, to belong to Christ’s spiritual kingdom in this world.”

In 1709, Mr. Stoddard of Northampton, published his *Appeal to the Learned*. It is no part of the object of that famous treatise to prove the right of baptized children to a name and a place in the church. Infant church-membership was assumed by this venerable author as the unquestioned sentiment and practice of the times. He makes use of the “*argumentum ex concessis*,” and endeavors to draw inferences,—though some of them are manifestly erroneous,—from the acknowledged fact that baptized children are members of the church. Mr. Stoddard had been a member of the Boston Synod of 1680, by which the visible church had been defined as including believers “and their children with them.” It is safe to affirm, therefore, without seeking further testimony, that infant church-membership was the received opinion in Massachusetts until after 1709.

This brings us near to the times of the great Edwards. He was settled at Northampton in 1727, as colleague with Mr. Stoddard, about two years before the death of the latter, and seems to have adopted his principles of church-membership and communion. Mr.

Edwards was afterwards led to question the propriety of admitting baptized persons, without personal piety or profession of faith, as Mr. Stoddard had done, to the Lord's-supper. He published his views in 1749, in opposition to Mr. Stoddard's Appeal, and the loose practice respecting communion which had crept into the churches generally. From this controversy, it has been affirmed in our times, without sufficient examination, that Edwards was opposed to the doctrine of infant church-membership. *Nothing can be farther from the truth.* He expressly concedes the point in the outset, that the baptized children of professors are truly members of the church, though not in complete standing. Nor has any thing been advanced in this discourse which stands in known opposition to the principles of church-membership and communion maintained by that gigantic mind in his answers to the "venerable Stoddard," Solomon Williams and other lax communionists of the times. Pres. Edwards had no occasion to establish the doctrine of infant church-membership by labored argumentation. It was a settled principle in the constitution of the New-England churches and had been from the first. Most of its early defenders had undertaken their work, not so much for the sake of the doctrine itself, as for the inferences respecting discipline, and the extension of baptismal privileges, which they considered deducible from it.

The point now in dispute was not—as a newspaper writer not long since intimated,—Whether baptized children are to be considered members of the visible

church? Nor whether it was proper to allow baptism to the children of baptized non-professors? But “Whether, according to the rules of Christ, any ought to be admitted *to the communion* and privileges of members of the visible church in *complete standing*, but such as are in profession and in the eyes of the church’s christian judgment, godly or gracious persons?”* Mr. Stoddard had maintained the affirmative, Mr. Edwards took the negative of this question. Neither deny the great congregational doctrine of infant church-membership, but both expressly recognise and affirm it.

As considerable confusion prevails on the exact nature of this controversy—and as some have associated it erroneously with another question, viz. the relation of baptized children to the church,—with which, as respects simple membership, it had nothing to do—it will be necessary to detail some of the historical facts which preceded and are connected with it.

The first settlers of New-England were eminent for wisdom and piety. They fled from the iron hand of oppression in the old world for the enjoyment of civil, but more especially religious liberty, in the new; and above all, that they might preserve their children from evil and rear a godly generation in the wilderness. “*Discipline*,” says Dr. Mather, “is the *cause of God* in New England. We are the children of the good old non-conformists. Now what was it that they did suffer so much for, but that so they and *their children*

* Qualifications for Communion.

also might be brought under that discipline and government which Christ hath appointed in his church? And, therefore, were they by their adversaries, the prelates, reproached with the name of disciplinarians; should we now desert the cause it would be a sad degeneracy. There are many godly souls in New-England, that the great motive which prevailed with them to come into this wilderness, was that so they might have *their children under the government of Christ in his church.*”* But at the time when the original churches of the country were founded, it was the general opinion of all congregationalists, presbyterians, and independents, throughout the world,—that a profession of personal godliness was an essential prerequisite in adults, to the enjoyment of sacramental ordinances. Not only the immoral, but those also who on arriving at maturity neglected to take upon themselves their early baptismal vows by open covenant, were considered unworthy to partake of the Lord’s-supper or to receive baptism for their children. The consequence was that many of the second generation and more of the third, growing up without making a personal profession of their faith in Christ, *their* children must necessarily be excluded from baptism and from any membership in the church. This was a sore grief to the New-England fathers. “Truly when I think,” says the writer last quoted, “and I often think of it seriously and sadly with myself, that in a *plantation of religion*,—for such New-England

*Mather’s Subject of Baptism.

was,—the inhabitants should be in the condition of infidels, that the posterity of a people professing godliness, yea of the most eminent professors in the whole world, should in one age be as infidels, even not so much as within *the compass of the visible church*, or have the livery and character belonging to Christians upon them, whereby such are distinguished from the infidel and pagan world, what it has to others I know not, but to me it has a most formidable appearance.”* It was considerations like these—connected with the fact that none but church-members were eligible to office or could vote at elections—which led the elders of the churches, at an early period after the settlement, to review the subject of baptism and church-membership and finally to decide *that the children of all baptized persons who, though not professors of godliness* nor qualified for the Lord’s-supper, were yet willing to make open acknowledgment of the covenant obligations, and promise to submit to the discipline of the church—might, and should receive baptism. This was a manifest innovation, upon the doctrine and practice of the fathers, and also,—as is shown by Mr. Foxcroft in his letter to Edwards,—upon the general sentiment of evangelical protestants throughout the world.† “I never heard,” says Mr. Baxter, as quoted by Foxcroft, “any man baptize an infant, but upon the parent’s, or susceptor’s, or offerer’s *profession of a justifying faith*.” It might be

* Preface to the First Principles of New-England.

† Appendix to Qualifications for Communion.

confessed, however, that many protestant churches in Europe, had fallen into laxness and formality in their *practice* upon this subject. Be this as it may, the good old puritans of New-England were sufficiently scrupulous and careful, as to the terms of admission to the sacraments. The doctrine of infant church-membership, with the subjection of children to the discipline of the church, was always received among them. But the *perpetuation* of church-membership, without the profession of faith on the part of parents, was a heresy which crept in by degrees. It was first a question whether baptism might be extended in any cases to grand-children, whose next parents had made no profession. This question was propounded as a case of conscience by the church in Dorchester to the Rev. John Cotton, teacher of the first church in Boston. The subject was publicly considered by the last named church assembled for the purpose "in the name of Christ." It was properly decided that the grandfather might lawfully claim baptism for his grand-child on two conditions. "First, that the grand-child baptized by right of the grand-father's covenant be committed to the grand-father's education." And 2d. "That the parents of the child do not thereby take occasion to neglect the due and seasonable preparation of themselves for entrance into covenant with God and his church." This letter is dated Boston, Dec. 16, 1634, and signed by John Cotton, Tho. Oliver, and Tho. Leverett.* It would

* First Principles of New-England.

lead us beyond our limits, and somewhat away from the subject immediately in hand, to give in detail the historical progress of the error in question. It may be sufficient to say, that neglecting the extreme caution of Mr. Cotton, many began to contend, that all baptized children being born in the church, and every where acknowledged church-members, were entitled to have baptism for *their* children, who being also born in the church were entitled to have baptism for *their* children also, in their successive generations. The fallacy of this reasoning has already been shown, in foregoing pages. But sophistical as it is, it gained currency in the churches, and being sustained by other considerations, it was decided by the synod of 1662, and confirmed by the General Court, though not without controversy and opposition,—that all persons who had received baptism in infancy, “understanding the doctrine of faith, and publicly professing their assent thereunto; not scandalous in life, and solemnly owning the covenant before the church; wherein they give up themselves and their children to the Lord, and subject themselves to the government of Christ in the church, *their children are to be baptized.*” This canon was framed for the purpose already specified, viz. that baptism might be administered to the children of persons who, though themselves baptized in infancy, were neither hopefully regenerate, nor supposed to be qualified for the Lord’s-supper.

Out of this heresy grew another. Some of the churches reasoned thus: Baptized persons being church-members, and as such entitled to baptism for

their children, ought to come to the Lord's table. For if they have all the qualifications requisite for the enjoyment of one sacrament, they have also for the other. This reasoning, with other considerations, prepared the way for an inflow of unspiritual communicants upon the churches which adopted it. The practice of admitting such persons to the Lord's table, though not general, had become so frequent that the synod of 1679 saw fit to bear public testimony against it. As one of the means by which the churches might avert the judgments of the Lord with which New-England had been visited, they say, "It is requisite that persons be not admitted unto communion in the Lord's-supper, without making a *personal and public profession of their faith and repentance*, and that therefore both elders and churches be duly watchful and circumspect in this matter." To this expression of opinion, Mr. Stoddard, then a young man and a member of the synod, seems to have given a hesitating *consent*. Some five-and-twenty years after, he openly espoused and taught the doctrine to his people in Northampton, and to the world, that the Lord's-supper was intended to be a *converting* as well as sanctifying ordinance, and should be received as such by all baptized persons who were moral in their lives, and serious believers in the principles of christian grace.*

A controversy ensued—and many churches, influenced by the great reputation of Mr. Stoddard for

* Life of Edwards.

learning, wisdom, and piety, more than by his arguments, adopted the practice of open communion. Pres. Edwards was a grandson of Mr. Stoddard, and, as already observed, was settled as his colleague in the ministry at Northampton, in 1727. Mr. Stoddard was at that time in his eighty-fourth year, and had been fifty-five years pastor of the church in Northampton. He was a man of great weight in the colonies, and had been active in the synods and councils of the last quarter of the preceding century. Through his practice and the influence of his writings, unspiritual members had been freely admitted to full communion, and had become perhaps the majority in most churches. Discipline was consequently neglected, and could not be enforced. The sacrament of the supper was diverted from its original design, if not in too many instances actually profaned. It was under these circumstances, several years after his settlement, that Edwards became fully convinced of the impolicy and sin of admitting persons professedly unregenerate to the Lord's table. In 1749, he published his "Humble Enquiry into the Rules of the Word of God, concerning the Qualifications requisite to a Complete Standing and Full Communion in the visible Christian Church."

The question discussed by Edwards, was not whether baptized children were within the pale of the visible church—nor whether their children might be entitled to baptism—but the question was, whether unregenerate persons, considering themselves unregenerate, and who were unregenerate in the judgment of

christian charity, and made no profession of faith, ought, under such circumstances, to partake of the Lord's-supper. Infant church-membership, therefore, was not the doctrine which Edwards opposed—nor had it been ever opposed by the leading fathers and churches of New-England, nor was it the cause of the decline of vital piety among them, nor is it responsible for the introduction of the half-way covenant scheme, so universally condemned in our day.

Edwards believed in the doctrine of infant church-membership, and would doubtless have employed his great powers in its defence, if occasion had required it. In the second paragraph of his "Qualifications for Full Communion," he says: "When I speak of members of the visible church of Christ in *complete standing*, I would be understood, of those who are received as the proper immediate subjects of all the external privileges Christ has appointed for the ordinary members of his church. All that acknowledge infant baptism, *allow infants* who are the proper subjects of baptism and are baptized, to be in *some sort members of the christian church*; yet none suppose them to be members in *such standing* as to be the proper, immediate subjects of all ecclesiastical ordinances and privileges. But that some further qualifications are requisite in order to this, to be obtained either in a course of nature, or by education, or by divine grace. And some who are baptized in infancy, even after they become to be adult, may yet remain for a season short of such standing as has been spoken of, being desti-

tute of sufficient knowledge, etc., and *yet not be cast out of the church*, or cease to be in any respect its members." The same sentiment frequently occurs in this celebrated treatise upon the terms of communion.

Dr. Hopkins' System of Doctrines was published under his own direction in 1792. He was a pupil of Edwards, lived for a season in his family, studied theology with him, and adopted his theological principles generally as the basis on which his own system was erected. His views on the subject in question are valuable, as well for the light they thus reflect upon Edwards' opinions, as for the weight of his own character and the general influence he has exerted upon the New-England church.

In his treatise concerning the baptism of the children of believers, Mr. Hopkins says: "By the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven which is the same, is meant the visible kingdom of Christ in this world or his church; in which sense this phrase is most commonly used by Christ. What he declares therefore is, that such children as these, that is the children of his friends who believe in him, belong to his kingdom, and *are to be members of his visible church*, and to be with their parents numbered among the redeemed."

"If children of visible believers are to be considered as having a right to be visible members of the kingdom of God and to be treated as such; then they are to be introduced to this visible standing in his church and kingdom, by the only door which Christ has fixed and opened for this, which is by being baptized

with water, in the name of the sacred Trinity, or being born of water.”

“The christian institution, now under consideration, is suited to have a salutary effect on the minds both of parents and their children. Though under the milder dispensation of the gospel, no one is to be put to death for rejecting Christ and the gospel, even though he were before this a member of the visible church; yet he is to be cut off, and cast out of the visible kingdom of Christ. And every child in the church, who grows up in disobedience to Christ, and in this most important concern will not obey his parents, is thus to be rejected and cut off, after all proper means are used by his parents and the church to reclaim him and bring him to his duty. Such an event will be viewed by christian parents as worse than death; and is suited to be a constant, strong motive, to concern, prayer and fidelity respecting their children and their education; and it tends to have an equally desirable effect upon children; and must greatly impress the hearts of those who are in any degree considerate and serious.”*

These and similar sentiments are often repeated and enforced in Mr. Hopkins' chapter on baptism. He indeed goes so far as to affirm, “That real holiness and salvation are secured to the children of believers, by the covenant into which the parents enter with God, as it respects their children, *if* the parents faithfully keep covenant, and fulfil what they profess

* Hopkins' System, Part. II, Chap. 5.

and promise, respecting their children, when they offer them in baptism." Without endorsing or controverting this opinion, it is sufficient, with the preceding extracts, to show that Hopkins was a decided believer in infant church-membership.

The opinions of Dr. Dwight on this subject next deserve consideration. He was president of Yale College when Hopkins' System was first published, and lived till 1817. "It is objected further," says he,* "in answer to the objections of Baptists, that all baptized persons are by that class of Christians, to whom I have attached myself, considered as members of the church; yet those who are baptized in infancy, are not treated as if they possessed this character. Particularly, they are not admitted to the sacramental supper; nor made objects of ecclesiastical discipline.

"As this objection has, in my own view, a more serious import, than any other which has been alleged, it deserves a particular consideration.

"In the first place, I acknowledge, without hesitation, that the conduct of those, with whom I am in immediate communion, and so far as I know them their opinions also, with regard to this subject are in a greater or less degree erroneous, and indefensible.

Many of the churches of this country, and many of the ministers also, appear to me to have judged and acted, with less accuracy, with less of scheme and comprehensiveness, concerning this subject, than concerning most others. I certainly do not intend to injure either churches or ministers by this remark, and

* Dwight's Theology, Vol. 5, Sermon CLVII.

persuade myself that I do not. A considerable number of the ministers have expressed to me their own dissatisfaction, with both the views and the practice, of both themselves and their fellow Christians, with respect to persons baptized in infancy. I am equally dissatisfied *with my own former views and practice respecting this subject* ; and readily admit that a part of what is contained in this objection is justly chargeable on many churches and many ministers who hold the doctrine of infant baptism. But it lies against the *errors of men who adopt this doctrine*, and not against *the doctrine itself*.

“That infants should be baptized and then be left by ministers and churches in a situation undistinguishable from that of other children, appears to me irreconcilable with any scriptural views of the nature and importance of this sacrament.”

Dr. Dwight believed in the church-membership of baptized infants. “That they are members of the christian church, if lawfully baptized,” says he, “I fully believe.” But on one point connected with this subject, this distinguished author seems to have drawn an unnecessary and injurious conclusion. For he adds, “I consider them members of the church general, but not of a particular church.” Without attempting to controvert this sentiment, or establish its opposite, it is submitted to the discerning whether it may not be a fact, that while some children are members only of the church general, baptized children most commonly are members of particular churches also. Many persons were anciently baptized, according to the New Testament,

without uniting with any particular church, and some in regions where no church had been organized. Children in such, and many other circumstances which might be named, would become members of the church universal by baptism. But when parents are orderly united to a particular church, what hinders their children from coming in with them? And what propriety can there be in saying that they are members of the church, and yet not of that particular church in which perhaps they were born, in which they received the initiatory ordinance, and to which their parents, and they in them, seem properly to belong? Upon any other theory, how can they be subject to efficient supervision. Is it not safe to say that—while all baptized *adults* are members of the church general, and most of them of some particular church also,—baptized *children* in like manner, though all members of the church universal, are yet most of them members of some particular church also?

The last authority which I shall quote, sustaining the doctrine of infant church-membership is Dr. Worcester, a name whose recent memory is still fragrant in all our churches. “The church,” says Worcester in his discourses on the perpetuity of the covenant, “remains the same,” i. e. the same that it was under the old dispensation, “and the covenant the same; the *relation of the children of the church is the same*, and the seal of the covenant, though varied in form, is still of the same import, and of the same use, and to be applied to the same subjects.”

Can it be longer questioned, in view of this full and unbroken series of testimony, that infant church-membership is and ever has been till of late years the sentiment of our leading divines and one of the foundation principles of the congregational churches of New-England.

The whole *presbyterian* church of the United States, as well as of the old world, maintains the same doctrine. The Confession of Faith, as amended and ratified by the General Assembly in 1821, defines the visible church to "consist of all those throughout the world, that profess the true religion, *together with their children*, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

The larger Catechism says, in answer to the question, "*What is baptism?*" "Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein Christ hath ordained the washing of water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, to be the sign and seal of ingrafting into himself, of remission of sins by his blood, and regeneration by his Spirit, of adoption and resurrection unto everlasting life; and whereby the parties baptized are solemnly admitted into the visible church, and enter into an open and professed engagement to be wholly and only the Lord's."

In the Form of Government,* it is affirmed as follows: "The universal church consists of all those

* Chap. II, of the Church.

persons in every nation, *together with their children*, who make profession of the holy religion of Christ and of submission to his laws." "A particular church consists of a number of professing Christians, *with their offspring*, voluntarily associated together, for divine worship, and godly living, agreeably to the holy Scriptures, and submitting to a certain form of government."

The Book of Discipline says, "that all baptized persons are members of the church, are under its care, and subject to its government and discipline; and when they have arrived at years of discretion, they are bound to perform all the duties of church-members."

The Directory teaches on this subject: that "Children *born within the pale of the visible church* and dedicated to God in baptism, are under the inspection and government of the church; and are to be taught to read, and repeat the catechism, the apostles' creed, and the Lord's prayer. They are to be taught to pray, to abhor sin, to fear God, and to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they come to years of discretion, if they be free from scandal, appear sober and steady, and to have sufficient knowledge to discern the Lord's body, they ought to be informed, it is their duty and their privilege to come to the Lord's-supper."

They are then to be examined as to their knowledge and piety, and when prepared, in the judgment of the eldership, for sealing ordinances, they are to

be admitted to the privileges of Christians in full communion.

It thus appears that the doctrine of infant church-membership is no innovation, but, though it seems to have been nearly lost sight of in our churches for many years past, is yet,—with the exception of those who deny infant baptism altogether,—THE GENERAL SENTIMENT OF THE NEW-ENGLAND CHURCHES, and of THE CHRISTIAN WORLD.

CHAPTER V.

THE PRECEDING PRINCIPLES APPLIED IN SEVERAL ADDRESSES.

I. *Address to Pastors.*

The writer of these pages would not assume to teach his fathers and brethren in the ministry. It would be more congenial to his feelings, to sit at the feet of many of them for instruction, on this and almost any other subject. He is certain, however, that he advocates no new doctrines, while he attempts to re-affirm one of the great principles of congregationalism, as held by the New-England fathers, and of Christianity as taught by the Apostles, and maintained for substance by most denominations in the old world and in the new. He confidently believes himself to have expressed no other sentiments than those which have been generally held by the soundest theologians among us. Nor can the number now be great who will dissent from the fundamental principles which have been examined.

It is confessed that the doctrine of infant church-membership seems to have been nearly forgotten of late years, and the *practice* which properly grows out of it, to have fallen into almost universal neglect, in our churches. Nor is it less certain, that the rite of infant baptism has lost much of that sacredness in the eyes of many, with which it used to be regarded by congregational believers in Jesus. There are some indeed, perhaps the majority among us, who still rejoice greatly in God's everlasting covenant, and can plead in faith for its promised blessings upon their infant seed ; and there are others who from the power of custom, or by way of privilege, can be easily influenced to make the baptismal consecration of their children. But there are some too,—and is not the number constantly increasing?—who cannot see the necessity, nor perceive the desirableness of this rite, and having their minds confused respecting it, and willing to avoid the trouble it occasions, are allowing their children to grow up strangers to the covenant of promise, and, in too many instances, without God in the world. They approve of the congregational principles and forms in most respects, and giving more or less evidence of piety are admitted to our churches upon a “half-way covenant” of modern invention. They understand and appreciate the promise “I will be *thy* God,” but “the God of *thy* SEED” they discard or disconnect from the divinely appointed token by which it is sealed and made sure to them. Several reasons may have assisted to produce this departure from the practice and faith of the fathers. Baptisti-

cal opinions and usages ; democratic institutions diminishing reverence and *individualizing* the people, making responsibilities and advantages personal rather than social ; the spiritual philosophy of the times, with a growing disrelish among protestants to ceremonies and forms, putting to peril even the sacramental ordinances which Christ himself appointed—these and other causes have had their influence. But among them all, none has been so disastrous as a general forgetfulness of the relation which baptized children hold to God and his church. If they are included with their parents in the covenant of redemption, and “ baptism seals it unto them,” then parents will feel the importance of placing the appointed token upon their offspring. But if infant baptism has scarcely an intelligible meaning, or is considered a mere form of consecration, and does not bring the children into Christ’s earthly kingdom, it will be difficult to make even pious parents see its necessity. Nor can the doctrine of infant baptism be powerfully defended without that of infant church-membership upon which *it is properly based*. And though no prophet, I desire to record my firm conviction, that if the doctrine of infant church-membership should be generally discarded or kept out of sight—the practice of infant baptism will eventually fall into greatly increased, if not general neglect. There seems to be no solid middle ground between old fashioned congregationalism which expresses the sentiment of the christian world on the subject, and the usages of that denomination who reject infant baptism altogether.

And is there a question which member of this alternative we shall choose? As congregationalists we hold to the perpetuity of the Abrahamic covenant, and to the superiority of the new dispensation in respect to privileges over the old. Let us then be consistent, and without idolizing the church on the one hand, or treating it with desecration or indifference on the other, let us recognise it as God's institution, founded for the edification and salvation of his covenant people, properly including all within its consecrated enclosures who have the baptismal mark of discipleship upon them.

The exclusion of baptized children from a name and a standing in the visible church, is most obviously as far as it prevails among evangelical congregationalists, a very recent innovation. From the remarks of Dr. Dwight, whose published works have been before the world but a quarter of a century, and who is personally remembered by many of the fathers in the ministry, it is evident, that the doctrine in question was *theoretically* acknowledged in his day—for the objection which he combats was founded upon the acknowledgement; while the practice and opinions of many had become loose and erroneous on the subject. Probably it is not—for how can it be?—denied outright by many orthodox and thorough theologians, even in our times. But the practical error of which Dwight complains and which still exists to an increasing and alarming degree deserves the prayerful consideration of all who have been set over the house of

God. Perhaps the idea of discipline, as involving restraint and reprehension, might have been carried too far by some of the early settlers of New-England. But even if this be so, it is no reason why an affectionate watch, direction, education of the children of the church—as young but real members of it—as lambs of the flock gathered with their parents into the Saviour's fold—should be neglected. We should give them at least, all the encouragement which God's own everlasting covenant is intended to afford. Nor need we conceal their true condition, with its obligations and responsibilities, "though we are gentle among them as a nurse cherisheth her children."

It is verily believed that if this principle of congregationalism can once more be reduced to practice,—and faithfulness in giving instruction, and in admitting suitable candidates and no others to the Lord's table, be not neglected—clergymen will be saved from much of that agitation and anarchy which now mars their labors—and from much of that grief,—in consequence of the wandering of so many lambs from the fold, attended as it is with general irregularity and disorder, and not unfrequently with the utter ruin of the children—which has brought down so many good men to premature graves.

Beloved brethren in the ministry, the time has come for anxious inquiry, whether amidst distracting influences, and multitudinous calls for service from every quarter, the young of our flocks have received that share of ministerial attention which the great shepherd demands of those who have been especially

commissioned to feed his sheep, and feed his lambs. There are many congregational clergymen who in the discharge of this great duty, have not fallen behind the very chiefest of the fathers. And if any of us have exhausted our powers of labor upon the adult generation, rather than upon those who, though now comparatively insignificant, are yet silently receiving impressions which in a few years will manifest themselves, for the renovation or destruction of the church, we are not without our apology. Short and uncertain settlements, multiplicity of meetings both at home and abroad, exhausting preparatory study, and painstaking to produce a succession of valuable if not great and popular discourses, which the intelligence of our congregations and the distraction of the times seem to demand, constant solicitude arising from the unsettled state of society, and that endless variety of *isms* which have been coming in upon us and sweeping over us like a flood, together with the unfortunate custom of estimating success almost entirely by immediate and manifest results—these things have an influence in turning off our minds from that numerous class which, though not in a situation to assist just now in opposing the waves of error and ungodliness, will soon rise up in the places of their fathers to make or destroy us.

It is not a question, whether men sinking already under accumulated labors, shall take upon their shoulders an additional load to crush them, but whether, if any part of the ministerial burden can be lightened, the care of the young is not the last to be thrown off?

What is the purport of our great commission? Most of us have not been appointed as evangelists to go into destitute settlements, and proselyte the inhabitants, but while we aid to the extent of our ability in bearing the gospel round the world, and bringing it home to every heart, it is some already existing church over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers, with the specific paramount duty to feed the sheep and feed the lambs.

Valuable aid in this part of our work may be obtained from the intelligent and pious laymen of the church. Under pastoral supervision and co-operation of the brotherhood, what a powerful engine of salutary influence upon the next generation, is the existing Sabbath school? Few ministers have the time, especially on the Lord's-day, as religious services are now conducted, to superintend its affairs. Nor is that a reasonable spirit which requires that a minister should engage earnestly in the duties of private catechetical instruction, when the public teachings of the sanctuary are summoning all his powers. But on the other hand, we may keep up a constant supervisory care of this institution. As a general of the army, as masters of the ship, as invested with responsibilities which we are under the oaths of office to meet, we may not leave our appropriate duties entirely to others. We have indeed brethren and sisters in our churches, who would perhaps almost lay down their lives for the children. For all their kindness of heart, for their faithful teachings, for disinterested labors, it becomes us to be grateful, and, availing ourselves of

all valuable assistance, we may be greatly encouraged and aided in our work. But after all, the ultimate responsibility of rightly directing the Sabbath school comes back upon ourselves. Imposed upon us by the calling of the Spirit, and the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, we *cannot* throw it off. Until we surrender our commission into the hands of the great head of the church from whom we received it, we must not only feed the sheep, but feed the *lambs*.

It is an encouraging circumstance that no labor gives promise of such great ultimate results. It is the present undergrowth which makes the future forest. It is the culture of the nursery—the budding and grafting of the tender shoots which determines the prospective character of the orchard. A distinguished statesman has said, as nearly as I can remember his words, that the best data, on which to form a prophecy of political events, ten years hence, is a knowledge of the opinions of the rising generation. To this it may be added, as a further developement of the same truth, that the probable character of the church fifteen or twenty-five years hence may now be discovered, by a knowledge of our own sentiments and purposes concerning the young. We form the minds, we found the characters, we fix the principles, which are destined under God to control the affairs of his kingdom, during the coming age. And as these may have a similar influence upon their own immediate descendants, we become debtors not only unto children's children, but to many generations. Nor need we be discouraged by the smallness of our individual influ-

ence, or the improbability of being an extensive benefit to mankind. A little rivulet which rises and ripples all unseen and alone in the wilderness of the far north may become in the progress of its descent, the largest river in the world. The smallest causes, when *faith* and prayer, and energy are among them, frequently produce in the providence of God, the most important results. "There is," says Milton, "as the apostle has remarked, a way to *strength* through weakness."

It is not necessary for me to mark out any course of pastoral instruction and care. They to whom these thoughts are addressed, have wisdom sufficient to be their own advisers. Let it be understood by the baptized children, that they are all members of the church; that they are under the strongest obligations to acknowledge their baptismal vows; that there is a definite period assigned for decision, self-examination, and profession, viz. that in which they become of age to act understandingly in the matter; that a good life, with evidence of regeneration and faith are essentially pre-requisites to the Lord's-supper; and that the blessings of the covenant are ever ready to descend upon them, and almost any course of wise instruction will contribute to the desired result.

II. *Address to the Brotherhood of the Church.*

Dear brethren and sisters in Christ, we have seen something of the peculiar relation which the children of professing Christians bear to the church. By our

terms of fellowship, as well as by the nature of the case, we have peculiar duties towards them. Though ministers have been appointed to take the supervision of the flock, and are under the most solemn oaths of office to be faithful ; this does not release the brotherhood from obligation. The cause is yours as well as theirs, for even ministers are “your servants for Christ’s sake,” chosen by yourselves, but commissioned by the Holy Ghost, to aid you and your children in growing up together with them,—into a holy temple of the Lord. Grow then in grace and assist the children to grow also.

1. By daily prayer to God for his blessing upon them. Never forget this humble but not unimportant portion of your number ; they are the hope of the church, and if made the objects of your affectionate and prayerful solicitude, will not disappoint your expectation.

2. By example. In this way the parent bird assists her inexperienced young to fly. Nor can the silent influence of a holy life, be other than most salutary, as a constraining means of grace.

3. By conversation as you have opportunity ; not being busybodies and intermeddlers even in the affairs of children, but endeavoring at proper times, to elevate, and enlighten their understanding, and, gently fortifying their virtuous principles, make if possible some healthful impression upon them all.

4. By instruction imparted, as occasion presents, whether as teachers in a Sabbath school, or in any other manner which propriety may direct.

It is the duty of the church, in connection with the pastor, to make arrangements for the safety, the education, the examination, and orderly reception of the young,—when prepared,—to full communion.

According to principles already laid down, children are to be admitted to the Lord's table, whenever they are old enough to comprehend the nature of repentance and faith, and give evidence of true piety in their lives. Let the church always be on her guard to see that her young candidates for communion have been qualified to receive the ordinance, by knowledge and by a serious consecration of their hearts to God. But at the same time we are not to look for full grown Christians among those who are just entering as mere babes in Christ into his school. In the language of the Platform, "The weakest measure of faith is to be accepted in those that desire to be admitted into the church, because weak Christians, if sincere, have the substance of that faith, repentance and holiness which is required in church-members; and such have most need of the ordinances for their confirmation and growth in grace. The Lord Jesus would not quench the smoking flax, nor break the bruised reed, but gather the tender lambs in his arms and carry them gently in his bosom. Such charity and tenderness is to be used, as the weakest Christian if sincere may not be excluded nor discouraged. Severity of examination is to be avoided."

As church-members you are, however, to share the responsibilities, with your pastors, of keeping the doors of the church, and guarding its sacraments.

According to the congregational usage, though the *act* of admission and exclusion is pastoral, yet no one can be admitted nor excluded, without the previous consent of the brotherhood. It is the duty of lay members therefore to obtain satisfaction with regard to the qualifications of all who are to be received into their fellowship. Nor should the doors of the kingdom ever be so widely opened, as to take in the vicious, the unbelieving, the untaught in the simple principles of Christianity, or those who give no evidence of submission to God. But wherever the doctrines of faith, repentance, and obedience are understood, and a serious desire of self-consecration is expressed, and the small beginnings of piety appear, and there is no immorality, or "error subverting the foundations" to oppose; the church should say both to children and adults, "Come in thou blessed of the Lord."

With regard to the degree of *manifest piety*, which is requisite to full communion, a simple rule may be given. We have already intimated that there must be repentance, faith, and affectionate obedience to God. But as it is difficult to discern the real condition of the heart, we must form our opinion of christian character from the fruits of the Spirit, as signified in the life. Moreover, as the boldest pretensions are often but deceptive indications of grace, and as the weakest piety is to be cherished as of inestimable worth, it is reasonable to require *such* repentance of sins as induces one to forsake them—such faith as

enables the person to say sincerely, "I receive Christ as my complete and only Saviour"—such love to Jesus as produces an acknowledged desire and evident endeavor to be like him. We cannot expect that mere *babes* in Christ, will understand all mysteries and all knowledge. If they can comprehend the simplest principles of our religion, such truths as are absolutely essential to salvation, and such as enables them to participate intelligently in the sacraments, we may hope that under proper instruction, they may both grow in grace, and ascend gradually to the high mysteries of revelation.

Nor does the duty of the church towards its children terminate with their admission to the communion table. They are still to be considered as weak in the faith, as those who stand in need of the prayers, the affectionate watch, and instruction of the older members. Nor should this sweet and all constraining supervision of christian love ever cease, till the rising generation are called to take the place of their fathers, in the discharge of similar obligations towards those who are younger and weaker than themselves.

The modern Sabbath school is also naturally committed to the guardianship of the church. No agent or association from abroad, no society or combination of individuals at home, however wise, however pious, however valuable as *aids* in the great work of educating the young, can so sustain the Sabbath school, as to relieve the church from responsibility. The institution is theirs. They, in connection with the pastor, are to appoint its officers and arrange its exercises,

selecting from among themselves their wisest and best members to superintend its affairs, and give faithful weekly instruction to every child.

Beloved brethren in Christ, is there not wonderful beauty and mercy in the institutions of our Lord? He gathers out of the world a great multitude of young but immortal souls, and on account of parental faith and covenant he marks them for his own. As you select some orphan, because of its relation to an old but deceased friend—or as you rescue some poor outcast child from the sins and miseries of abject want, and adopt it as your own, making yourself responsible for its education, giving it a chance for respectability among men, so God receives a great multitude of little ones into his palaces, requiring his servants to cherish and bring them up for him. From the day of their baptism, the robes of the church, the livery of Immanuel, the badges of discipleship are upon them. They are a consecrated class, a peculiar people, and though not necessarily new creatures in Christ Jesus, are yet candidates, by divine appointment, for regenerating grace. Born of water, dedicated in faith, we may reasonably expect that unless their education should be neglected, or they should wilfully, like Esau, sell their birthright, they will at an early age give evidence of having been born of the spirit also.

How interesting then the baptismal service! What is it but the opening of heaven's gate, and the visible recovery and admission of a wandering soul? O what encouragement for prayer that the heart, all unsanctified by nature, may soon, yea now, receive that spirit-

ual baptism which is represented by the outward rite, and which both in parent and in child is indispensable to fellowship with saints in heaven.

When some little one is solemnly introduced into the kingdom of Jesus, when some sweet unconscious babe is publicly consecrated to its parents' God—let your hearts arise in silent holy strains of praise. Let the church stretch forth her affectionate arms and take the precious trust to her bosom. Let the offering be presented to the great Shepherd, saying, Lord take this little lamb, which we, through thy grace, have snatched from the old roaring lion's mouth; and set thy mark upon it, while we solemnly covenant to nourish and bring it up for thee. Then by faith you may behold the heavens opening from above—the Son of God descending and laying his holy hands upon the child, and imparting his blessing. From this time forth the baptized babe is to be recognised as a child of the covenant—signed and sealed by the Saviour—ordered in all things and sure. Unless such children should be afterward rejected through unbelief, the blessings of the God of their fathers will be upon them, renewing, sanctifying, saving, and receiving them into glory—for faithful is he that hath promised. “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud;—and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh.” Like that beau-

teous arch which spans the cloud, coming forth as a bright remembrancer before the throne of God, and amidst thunder, darkness and storm, speaking peace and safety to man, so the church, amidst the follies and wanderings of her children, the temptations and dangers which surround both herself and them—

—Surveys *her* covenant sign, and *smiles*.

“For this is as the waters of Noah unto me ; for as I have sworn the waters shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee.”

III. *Address to Parents who are Professors.*

See here, my friends, the tenderness of Christ. Receiving you into covenant, for your sakes, he receives your children also. They are the objects of his peculiar watch ; “their angels do always behold your Father in heaven.” Look upon them as marked, and consecrated to God. Educate them for the Saviour’s service, more than for worldly advantage ; according to the principles of our religion, rather than in the maxims and customs of this present evil world. Follow them wherever they go with your prayers ; carry them every day in the arms of parental love to the cross ; plead for their salvation as children of the everlasting covenant ; expect, watch for their conversion ; and when you discover the buds of grace upon them, encourage them—by a public profession of their

faith, and acknowledgement of their baptism,—to come to the table of the Lord.

Let no parent suppose that he may safely delay all personal inquiry into the spiritual state of his children, till they get courage to come forward and boldly ask the way to heaven. Remember what is said, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” So in like manner, if we have hope in Christ, we should be beforehand with our children, in seeking their eternal salvation. We stand as their sponsors, having taken upon ourselves the most solemn vows, that, as far as in us lies, they shall be nurtured in the faith of our Lord, and induced at an early age to make a sincere and intelligent profession of their allegiance to him. We can hardly expect that a timid child, naturally reserved on all such subjects, and by little irregularities exposing himself to reproof almost every day—should get courage to acknowledge himself, without being questioned, an earnest seeker after Christ. There have been children, and some of them very young, who would have given worlds if they had possessed them, for confidence, for moral ability—to have unbosomed a soul, full of darkness, conflicts, and distresses, for parental counsel. And although the heart was beating with desire to throw off its burden, and many a tear was shed in secret—nothing but the strictest confidence, the most delicate respect for sacred feelings—nothing but the most favorable occasion, nay, almost necessity, could have brought the long concealed emotions into view. The experiences of a soul when “heaven lays all around” it, or when

spiritual darkness shuts the light from its longing vision, are not for vulgar gaze. They must be gently drawn forth by a wise and pious mind, who will treat them, though they be the feelings of a child, with the utmost tenderness and respect. Let the parent then watch for favoring occasions. Coming down from the mount of communion, and seeing the cloud of the Highest overshadowing his child, let him with gentleness and awe, but with naturalness and familiarity, call forth his most hidden, most sacred emotions.

If there are no indications of early faith or anxious seeking after God, let not the parent in covenant despair of success, or neglect any suitable opportunity, of winning the wayward spirit to Christ. Perhaps in some unexpected hour, a mother's sigh, a father's prayer, may breathe over the youthful soul, like the wind through a harp, and be made the means of waking music on its strings, and bringing forth sweet tones of heaven.

Be this as it may—let no parent grow weary of watching, praying, seeking for the germ of faith. And when all has been done by instruction and counsel, which good judgment will allow, let the parental influence be always like that of some guardian angel spirit which is ever hovering near, and even though unseen, sheds heavenly fragrance from its wings.

If any of you, beloved friends, have *infants unbaptized*, beware of unnecessary delay in bringing them to the baptismal font. We must not even *seem* to despise the covenant, and expose our little ones to peril, by such neglect. Remember we have no option on

this subject. God not only permits, he *requires* us to set *his* mark upon our babes. In that charter of spiritual rights which he gave to Abraham, the father of believers, amidst all the blessings promised, he has uttered one terrific voice of warning. If a parent refuse or neglect to circumcise his child, such child shall be cut off from God's people ; "*he has broken,*" says he, "*my covenant.*" Baptism has taken the place of circumcision. If you neglect to offer your infants for baptism, without sufficient reason for delay, you deny them their birthright and hazard the displeasure of him who sometimes mysteriously "visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children." I know not what allowance may be made for ignorance, or unintentional mistake—but when duty is made clear, it cannot be neglected with impunity.

With impunity did I say, will you deny to yourself and to your offspring such a privilege ? You have been the occasion of their existence. By your means they have entered upon a course of unending happiness or distress. Their immortal spirits will outlast the sun ; co-eternal with the eternity of God, they can never cease to be. That great and good Being who breathed into their nostrils the breath of life has proposed to take them with yourselves under his peculiar protection. In pursuance of this benevolent design, and as an indication of your faith in his covenant, he has given you the baptismal *token*. As the sign of blood upon the door-posts of ancient Israel, was a safeguard from the angel of death, on that awful night of slaughter, when all the first-born of Egypt

perished, so the NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, with the emblem of that sanctification which secures fellowship with God, is a sign of infinite mercy, and protection from the destroyer. But, as even in favored Goshen, no master of the family might expect the preservation of his household, unless, as commanded, he had gathered them home, and sheltered them beneath that holy sign, so we may never expect the blessings of the covenant upon any, by whom the *token* of the covenant is rejected. Look then upon the face of that unoffending child. Receive its daily caresses, as daily remembrancers of its uncovenanted exposure, and its claim, by birthright, for blessings thus far unreasonably denied. Weep mothers, weep! that while you yourselves have entered the fold, your little helpless ones, justly entitled to the Shepherd's care, have been left, by your negligence, without. Go gather them in from the world and bring them to Jesus. Present them before the baptismal font—

A few calm words of faith and prayer,
A few bright drops of holy dew,
Shall work a wonder there,
Earth's charmers never knew.

Perhaps some parents, receiving new views of the importance of baptism, may now begin to be perplexed with fear, that while their children have been ceremonially given up to God, there was a failure on their part, of that faith which is necessary to make the offering acceptable. You do well to institute that soul-searching inquiry. For how can we expect the bles-

sings of a *covenant* which in fact we never made? I will suppose then that you presented your children for baptism, in ignorance and thoughtlessness of the solemn duty in which you was called to engage—and that, considering it a mere naming ceremony, or genteel Sabbath-day service, you have since experienced from it no other reward. In remembrance of your deficiency you do well to mourn. And if calamities have befallen you, especially if these baptized ones have been sources of anxiety or of grief, it will be right to inquire, if it is not for this very neglect, that God has a controversy with your house. Be this as it may, a broken and a contrite spirit, even at this late hour, is in the sight of God of great price. It may not be possible, it certainly is not necessary, that you should offer your children a second time for baptism. They have already been introduced into the church, and unless first excluded, cannot properly be admitted again. What then is the remedy for this past defect of faith? It is found in the words of inspiration, “Repent and do thy first work.” The outward act was sufficient, and should not be repeated, but the inward emotions were at fault. Let me entreat you then to enter into some secret place and mourn, commune with thine own ingathered spirit, and amidst the multitude of its penitential thoughts, consecrate thy children by earnest prayer to God, exercising that faith in reference to their baptism, which ought to have been experienced when it was administered.

You have a further duty towards those whom you once offered to Christ. It is to inform them distinctly

that the seal of God's covenant has been placed upon them, and that they are under the highest obligations to make acknowledgement of it. By private but earnest prayer, by a more formal consecration of the family at the domestic altar, if you are a householder ; by giving such instruction as circumstances will allow, you are now prepared to lay hold by faith upon the covenant, and appropriate through grace the blessings it secures.

Nor is it necessary, let me repeat, to perform the outward ceremony again. God's own appointed mark is already upon your children. He has made the covenant, and signed and sealed it, according to his custom. Whenever it is recognised *as his covenant* by you, and accepted in your heart and prayers with an appropriating faith, then it becomes *good*, to all the intents and purposes for which it was given. Suppose that the baptismal token, instead of water had been an image of the cross, visibly and indelibly imprinted upon the forehead. The impress would be the same, however great the strength or deficiency of faith. It would ever stand forth, as an assurance of peculiar covenant love, to all who possess corresponding qualifications. So long as you are without these, the agreement is incomplete. But the moment you possess them the covenant becomes sure. Thus in the case of baptized children, whose parents presented them without faith. Nothing more, by way of visible sign, can be wanting on the part of God. His *token* has been placed upon the children. Accept it,

ye fathers and mothers, by strong appropriating faith, and it can never be disannulled.

It is safe and becoming in all parents frequently to renew the baptismal vow, both secretly and in presence of their household. Again and again, you should dedicate these objects of your love with yourselves to God—again and again recognise in their presence, both your own covenant obligations and their corresponding duties. In seasons of trial, when they wilt in your arms, under the power of disease—in times of discouragement, when you see them assailed by temptations and ready to give way ; when, through forgetfulness of their parents' God, they have come to lay like a heavy burden upon your heart, what more natural, as a means of relief, than retirement, self-humiliation and prayer ; renew the covenant and plead the promises—and as you rise from your knees, lo ! the bright baptismal bow stands forth upon the melancholy cloud which overhung your spirit. “ For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.”

IV. *Address to the Baptized.*

This subject demands the attention of all the baptized. In the first place, of those baptized persons who are themselves professors. “ You have come under solemn obligations from which you can never escape.” Whether you were consecrated to God by

your parents, and have since assumed the baptismal promises, by your own personal act, or whether you were admitted to the church on profession of your faith, you were introduced by the rite of water baptism, and being now members in full communion, you are accountable for a right discharge of all the duties, —and performing your part of the engagement, are entitled through grace to all the blessings of a person in full covenant with God. I repeat the solemn words, in full covenant with *God*. He who descended in awful majesty on Sinai,—He who appeared in the gentle form of Bethlehem's infant King,—He before whose unapproachable light the ancient seraphim continually cry, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,—He who in the person of crucified Immanuel, his only begotten son, is ever saying to the penitent, be of good cheer thy sins are forgiven thee,—He whose treasures of goodness are an unfathomed deep, and whose mercy endureth forever,—He has entered into an everlasting covenant with you. His promises are yea and amen, imperishable as his throne, and no tongue can tell the blessings which, even when ages on ages on ages shall have travelled by, his friendship shall continue to secure. With this Being, *your* God, you have entered into an engagement of allegiance, obedience, confidence and love. By the baptismal act, you was solemnly introduced into his church, his temple, his name, his mysterious triune being. Born of water, if you have also been born of the spirit, then have you entered into the invisible as

well as the external kingdom of God. You have come into his communion, his fellowship. You live beneath the glorious cloud of his overshadowing deity. Patriarchs, and priests of the inner temple, prophets and apostles, holy confessors, and many a myriad of star-crowned saints, whose "names" unknown on earth, "are written in heaven," are but fellow-citizens with you in the great household of faith. O, ye believers in Jesus, introduced by baptism into the presence, into the NAME of the Father, Son, and Spirit, called to an endless progress in holiness, to ascend forever, mansion above mansion in glory, what manner of persons ought ye to be? "Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." The conflicts of life will soon be over, its sorrows and sins will discomfit no more; and the sanctified spirit, realizing all that was emblemed by the cleansing water, shall stand forth in the white baptismal robe of a Saviour's righteousness; to go no more out of his presence forever.

2. I would address a few words to all baptized persons who are *not* professors of religion, especially those of whatever age, who are capable of understanding the nature, and taking upon themselves the obligations of that covenant under which they are placed.

Beloved friends, partakers of the heavenly calling, you have been consecrated and set apart for God; and, on account of a parents' faith, the shadow of Almighty protection has been over you to this day. You are *strictly* members of the church—and heirs of the promises. Before you were old enough to act for yourselves, you were solemnly introduced by your pa-

rents, as lambs of the same flock with themselves. The Shepherd of Israel received you into his fold—promising to be your God, during all your earlier years—and *ever after—provided*, that when you come to an understanding age, you would assume your parents' vows as your own. To make the covenant sure, and to assist the eye of faith by that of sense, he set his *own mark* upon you. That *mark* or sign of the covenant is baptism. As a sign, it represents the necessity of spiritual cleansing. In other words, it signifies that as water cleanses the body, so *you*, so all, must be cleansed in spirit, before you can be admitted to the kingdom of heaven. This peculiar *mark* of God was placed upon you, by his appointment. It was not done by your own act, nor by the act of your parents who brought you in their arms to the altar. It was done by the act of God. A human hand indeed sprinkled the consecrated drops upon your brow. But man though solemnly set apart by ordination vows, has no power or sacredness of his own. He acts only as the agent, as the servant of God, who has required him to place the seal of the covenant upon the children of the covenant. God then, who has a right to all, has designated *you* for himself. He has said to the parents and to the church, "take this child and bring it up for me, and I will be its God." By this same baptismal act, the parents promised in your name, that to the extent of their ability, you should renounce the vanities of the world and the lusts of the flesh, and live a Christian life. Every thing was done for your salvation, except what necessarily

depends on yourself. It only remains, that having arrived at an understanding age, you now subscribe with your *own* hand and heart, to the terms of this holy covenant. Waiting for this your act, to which you are bound by all that is sacred in parental and redeeming love, God has fulfilled his part of the promise, and has been your God thus far—preserving you alive, and surrounding you with the restraining influences of his grace, and often reminding you, by a still voice in the soul, that you are not your own. What mean those stirrings of conscience—those occasional meltings of heart—those secret impulses towards repentance and towards God which you sometimes feel? What are they but the movements of his spirit, given according to the baptismal covenant, and inciting you to consecrate yourself to the God of your fathers!

Let me ask then, how have you fulfilled, on your part, the baptismal vow? You are of an age to act for yourself. Have you chosen or renounced your parents' God—the God who received you in early childhood beneath the bright expanse of his all-surrounding covenant? Perhaps you have never before realized that you are, strictly speaking, a member of the church—that you ought to show forth in your conduct the signs of renewing grace. Examine yourselves. Do you hate sin? Do you “delight in the law of the Lord after the inward man?” Do you exercise a transforming faith in Jesus Christ? Do you hold communion with your heavenly father? Do you strive to keep all his commandments? You ought then to make a public profession of your faith! By

solemnly avouching the Lord Jehovah to be your God, in the presence of the congregation, you ought to acknowledge the baptismal act of your parents to be your own. Inquire not so much after the day or the year of your spiritual birth, as for the evidences of spiritual life. It may be that years ago the spirit of God, in remembrance of this his everlasting covenant, planted the seeds of grace in your heart. It may be that in answer to parental prayers, ever flocking around the throne of God, divine influences have been descending, gently and unseen as the dew upon you—and that on some favored season of unusual meltings of soul, you may have begun to exercise a living faith. If you have in your own experience the evidences of a renewed heart, no longer delay to assume your baptismal obligations, and acknowledge the faithfulness of God in what he has done for your soul.

But if, alas, after all your privileges, you are a conscious stranger to that peace of God which passeth all understanding, O then, let me expostulate with you, on the exceeding ingratitude and sinfulness of your course. By the rite of baptism you have been admitted to the church. The emblem of sanctification, God's own appointed token, was placed upon your brow. Perhaps at that awful moment a parent's heart was beating high with hope and prayer—perhaps a mother's tear mingled with the crystal drops, and coursed down your unconscious cheek—perhaps some guardian angel was appointed to watch over your erring steps, and keep you, if possible, within the safe enclosures of covenant love. What mean ye, O

thoughtless ones, that with guilty feet ye have strayed far away from the fold? Parental love cries after you, perhaps from the skies, "know thou, O my child, the God of thy fathers and serve him with a perfect heart!" God's seal is set upon you—there it has been, through all the storms of passion, and all the sinful wanderings of an unregenerate mind! When you mingled in the worldling's revelry—in all the days of prayer restrained and holy fear cast by—through every scene of reckless sin or more decent impenitence, the imprint of his covenant has never been effaced. The impure but baptized child—though now perhaps a man of numerous years, still wears the holy mark. There it rests upon his dishonored brow—and shines alone when all around is dark. And there it will forever rest, pointing out the baptized sinner as a spirit of no ordinary guilt, in the realms of woe.

O friends, children of the church, whether young or advanced in years, let me entreat you, in the name of parents offering you to God, in the name of that Shepherd who gave his life a ransom for the sheep, despise no more his holy covenant; return to the fold from which you have wandered, and henceforth follow in the footsteps of the flock.

3. There is yet one class among you whose position is peculiarly responsible. I refer to baptized non-professors who are the parents of unbaptized children. It is yours to interrupt or perpetuate the flow of covenant blessings. They have descended in silvery waves from the Abrahamic fountain. Siloa's brook,

in its long meanderings, has found its way around your dwelling, fertilizing the fields, and supplying healthful waters for all the house. But by your own negligence there is a gathering obstruction in the stream, which if not soon removed, will change the course of this sacred channel, and leave that beautiful patrimony, which ought to descend in all its freshness to your children's children, as an unwatered heath. Will posterity call you blessed? Can we venerate and love the memory of an ancestor who negligently squandered the estate which came to him with princely privileges from his fathers, and which he was bound, by natural affection and by oath, to transmit unimpaired to his descendants? Is there not cruelty beyond what is common among men to deny to our own posterity, through thoughtlessness and sin, a name registered in the book of life?

You my friends are in covenant with God. They who taught your infant lips to say, our Father who art in heaven, have committed to your trust a pearl of great price, received from the skies, for themselves and for all their descendants. I know not whether the arms which brought you to the baptismal altar are yet cold in death—or whether tears are still coursing along the furrows of that cheek which wasted its youthful bloom for you—but this I know, it is ingratitude, deep, dark, I had almost said damning ingratitude, to throw away, to tread under foot the everlasting covenant of God, and deny this greatest of all blessings which your fathers left you to your children. Seriously consider, solemnly ponder, the dread responsibilities

under which you are placed. Remember the God of your parents—and secure without delay his overshadowing covenant for your children.

There is one more topic which in this connection will be briefly discussed. Such is the importance of baptism—that some may anxiously inquire, have I been so baptized, as to be recognised by the Head of the church as a member of his visible kingdom? Were my parents properly entitled to the privilege? Did they present the offering with acceptable faith? Was the ordinance administered by an authorized person? Was the church that received me a true church of Jesus Christ? Is my baptism certainly valid without repetition?

In answer to these questions which have occasioned distress in many minds, it should be observed, that if the ceremonial validity of baptism is to depend upon the complete qualification of all the persons engaged in its administration, no individual could ever be certain that he had been properly baptized. We must look then for some different principle by which to solve the difficulty in question. If there was default in the administration of the ordinance, the sin must come upon the defaulters. If there was sacrilege, they are accountable for it. But the validity of the act, as respects the baptized person, is not destroyed. God's mark may have been placed upon you by unauthorized hands. But still his mark is upon you. You was baptized not into the deficiencies of men, not into the *errors* of any particular church, but into *the* church which is God's temple, into the name of

the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Whether lawfully or unlawfully, you have been admitted,—you are a member of the church, already within its inclosures, with the badge of discipleship upon you. Now if any person has performed this act, without authority, on his own head be the sin. As in the case of marriage, illegality in the ceremony, while it exposes the violation of law to punishment, does not impair the marriage contract.

Further; all that was essential to you personally in the ceremony has been performed. You have been visibly consecrated to God, by the application of the appointed emblem, and according to the prescribed baptismal formula. Your personal acceptance of all the obligations and privileges implied in this rite, makes it good henceforth, whatever it may have been heretofore. Be the deed more or less imperfect, as respects the original signing, it becomes valid when you put your name to it. The seals of the instrument are well enough, whoever may have put them on; the *name*, or your own spiritual reception of God's covenant, is all that is wanted. Your case, to make the worst of it, resembles that of some heathen child among the ancient Canaanites or Moabites, whose parents, without authority or faith, performed upon him the rite of circumcision, but who being afterwards converted to Judaism, desires the privileges which belong to the worshippers of Israel's God. He need not, of course from the nature of the ceremony he cannot, be circumcised again. The token of God is upon him, let him now, by his own profession of faith, acknowl-

edge it, as *God's token*, bringing him under the responsibilities and blessings of the covenant, and he will be received, unquestionably, as "an Israelite indeed."

Let no one infer from these remarks that informality and negligence, and the want of right views and feelings, in the administration of baptism, is deemed of inconsiderable importance. How much more satisfactory to all concerned, how much greater the probability of securing divine favor, and of obtaining a fulfilment of all the great and precious promises implied in this rite, when the offering is made according to the divine appointment, and with true faith on the part of pastor, parents and the church.

Present your babes before the altar, ye fathers and mothers in covenant, after private meditation, humiliation and prayer. Come to the temple with holy communings and faith, and lay the child, as the cleansing emblem falls upon it, into the bosom of your God.

Let silence pervade the sanctuary, while the house is filled with the UNSEEN, making "the place of his feet glorious."

Let the church bow reverently, with serious renewal of her covenants, while *mercy* throws open the portals of the kingdom, to gather in another of the lost.

O that God's ambassadors, as with uplifted eyes and heart and dripping hand, they say, I baptize thee into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, might ever see the heavens opened, and the spirit of God descending like a DOVE and lighting upon the children. And as the prayer goes

on, "ratify in heaven what has now been done upon earth; let what is signified by water-baptism be realized in this and all its subjects," O that the power of the Highest might come upon the congregation, and the Holy Spirit overshadow the children of the church, while faith whispers in every heart, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

V. *Address to the Unbaptized.*

To you, my friends, the ordinance of baptism has never been administered, either on account of your own faith or that of your parents. Christian faithfulness forbids concealment of your true condition. You lie at the uncovenanted mercy of God justly displeased with the world, on account of sin. But I will explain.

The scriptures fully teach the fall of man, and the consequent sinfulness and ruin of the human race. In the progress of ancient society, evil increased continually, and filled the earth with violence. There was indeed a gentle whisper of hope, addressed to attentive penitence, but it came upon those wicked generations before the deluge, like the first faint ray of morning twilight upon a night of storms. Here and there a solitary individual, like Enoch the seventh from Adam, who was a preacher of righteousness and walked with God, observed the heavenly harbinger, hailed it in faith and rejoiced. But mankind, generally, almost

entirely, became so corrupt, that He who created them, could not bear them in his sight. He swept them from the face of the earth by the flood.

With one good man and his family, miraculously preserved, God entered into a covenant, that he would no more destroy the earth after this manner, "though," said he, "man be evil from his youth." In the midst of these mighty works, humanity was put upon its second trial. A few generations passed away, and the descendants of godly Noah had become nearly as vile as their antediluvian progenitors. But instead of destroying them a second time, God was pleased to leave them to their own way, that they might be filled with their own devices.

In this condition of things, he called Abraham out of a land of idolaters, into the country which was afterwards possessed by his descendants; and in connection with the great faith and holiness of this individual, having prepared his mind for it, he gave him some intimations of infinite good in store for mankind, and in his person laid the foundations of the church. He entered into a covenant with him, for himself and his posterity, saying, "in thee also shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." He gave him the rite of circumcision to assist the believer's faith, and perpetuate religion in the world. As a *sign*, it represented the necessity of spiritual cleansing in order to acceptance with God; as a seal, it gave assurance of mercy and blessings to all who should exercise faith.

This was the origin of the church. From these small beginnings, made almost three thousand years

ago, it gradually increased, till in process of time, after a long period of darkness, distresses and deliverances, the posterity of Abraham, having become like the stars for multitude, had overspread and possessed the *holy* land ; called *holy* because inhabited by a people in covenant with God.

This nation, after its deliverance out of Egypt, and organization under Moses, became the peculiar dwelling-place of the Most High. It was called “the congregation of the Lord,” and in the dying speech of martyred Stephen, “the church of God in the wilderness.”

Within this ancient church, walled round by its covenant, and by its peculiar initiatory rite—and separated from the more utterly corrupt portions of mankind—Jehovah began to make glorious and awful revelations of himself. By a series of astounding miracles, especially by his majestic descent on Sinai, he gave visible assurance of his being, of his sovereignty, of his almighty power, and of his goodness. In the midst of this church, though many of its members were utterly abandoned, and the whole body was often in “a horror of great darkness,” on account of its sins, there arose a multitude of holy minds, prophets, seers, kings, psalmists, martyrs, whose gigantic faith, and splendid intellects, and noble deeds, have never been surpassed ; as also a host of humbler saints, who would have done honor to the apostolic or millennial age. It is those of whom it is written, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that “through faith they subdued kingdoms,

wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, and out of weakness were made strong. Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy;) they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and in caves of the earth. All these having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise"—i. e. the Messiah—"God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

In this very church Jesus was born, nurtured, crucified. He was its long promised Redeemer, its crowning glory, its Lord. He came not to destroy it, but to secure the fulfilment of the high intentions for which it was founded. Standing between the foregoing and the succeeding eras, uniting in his own person baptism and circumcision, the passover and the supper of the Lord, he is a connecting link between the ancient and modern end of the chain. Raised upon the cross, extending one of his bleeding arms over the old dispensation and the other over the new, he binds them both together in one church, of which himself is the centre, the salvation and the Head; and having given eternal life to all the covenant children of God, through their faith in a Messiah to *come*, he offers the same blessing, through the actually incarnate, crucified and risen Saviour, to as many as come after him.

Thus, after the awful darkness of the crucifixion, the church came forth under its risen and ascended leader, like the sun emerging from a cloud; or, like the eagle, moulting her disarrayed plumage, she threw off the slough of obsolete ceremonies and unspiritual members, and spread her wings for a flight among the nations, in all the beauty and young strength of a regenerated existence.

From the time of this great revival, this moral resurrection of the church, the Holy Spirit has taken up his unseen abode in the midst, and though often withdrawing from the unspiritual, being grieved away, he never has forsaken, he never *will* depart from his people, till the kingdoms of the world become subject to Christ.

The church in our day is still the same body as of old, preserving its identity through all varieties of change, adversity, and growth. The daughter of heaven, the Zion of the old testament and the new, walled in by her covenant, enriched by the ordinances and oracles of God, irradiated by that unseen TEMPLE which is greater than Solomon's, and rejoicing in her King, she is the hope and the glory of the world.

It is into this sanctuary, this "hiding place from the storm, this refuge from the tempest, this shadow of a great rock in a weary land," that you are invited to enter. There is room enough in this many-mansioned house, there is bread of heaven, (for men eat angels' food,) there is water from the everlasting well, sufficient for all. Admitted through the door of baptism, having the three characteristics of discipleship, REPENT-

ANCE, FAITH, and OBEDIENCE, you may dwell henceforth beneath the bright expanse of Jehovah's covenant.

Let not your minds be confused with any variety of creeds, sects, and party names. "The visible church," says the confession of faith, "consist of all those throughout the world, that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation."

The various provinces of the Saviour's kingdom, may be more or less complete in their organization, or loyal to their king. Some of them may be alienated from others, and some by their idolatries, or unbelief, may have cut themselves off from the fellowship of the saints, and others still be exposed to punishment on account of their sins. But the Head of the church is able to manage all these its affairs. It is yours, to submit yourself to his authority, to put yourself under his government, receiving the visible token of membership, subscribing the covenant of allegiance, and uniting yourself to the best portion of the church which you can find, in the region where you dwell. By so doing, you will become the blessed of the Lord, the fellow-citizens of prophets and apostles, of seraphim and angelic bands. You will belong to the innumerable company of the ransomed, and be the joyful subjects of the great King.

From what has been said it will be seen that the unbaptized are not in covenant with God. They are

“aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise.” For although baptism is not a saving ordinance of *itself*, without the regenerating power of the spirit,—and although the want of baptism will not exclude those who are entitled to it, but cannot obtain it, from everlasting life after death,—yet what confidence can we have in the piety or salvation of any, by whom baptism is despised or intentionally neglected. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” “Except a man be born of water and of the spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Both the outward ordinance and the corresponding inward grace are made essential, by the Head of the church. In the case of adults, spiritual regeneration precedes baptism, as in Mark xvi, 16. Among the infants of believers, the birth of water naturally precedes the birth of the spirit, as in John iii, 5.

The church, and her King, extends the invitation of covenant love to all the unbaptized. Come, ye weary and heavy laden, ye tempest-tossed and troubled, come. Fathers and mothers, young men and maidens, old men and children, come. Come lowly, come with repentance, with faith, with “a full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience,” and you will find admission not only to the church on earth, but through its humble peaceful walks, to that temple which is not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Nor is it necessary for children who are old enough to understand these remarks, to abide ever in the cold

storms without, until their parents bring them in. Born, many of them, around the church, near enough to see its light and hear its rejoicings, secretly sighing to enter, they invite the sympathy of all who dwell beneath the covenant of God. They cannot, they must not reproach their parents; but they cannot, they ought not to forget, that the father whom they reverence, the mother whom they love, have never sought for them that heavenly inheritance, to which they might otherwise be entitled. For this class my sensibilities bleed, and were it of any avail, my tears would freely flow! We cannot accuse them of personal guilt, in being aliens by birth; nor can we conceal the fact, that while an awful cloud hangs over the world on account of sin, they remain unsheltered by that covenant, which God has provided for his flock, not excluding the lambs. Nor will we deny, that the children of non-professors must give evidence of personal faith before they can receive those privileges, which no believing parent or authorized sponsor has secured for them.

But my young friends, there is encouragement for you. Are you sorry for your sins, with that sorrow which leads you to forsake them? Though weak in faith, have you such confidence in Christ as enables you cordially to acknowledge him as your Saviour? Have you such love to Jesus as makes you earnestly desire to be like him and obey him? Then you may come to the baptismal altar, and receiving the sacred ordinance at the hands of God's messenger, be henceforth as others, a child of the covenant.

CONCLUSION.

I have said nothing respecting the mode of baptism, nor is it necessary. The *leading idea* in christian baptism is neither sprinkling, nor affusion, nor immersion. It is rather a visible restoration of lost communion with God, a solemn introduction into the name and fellowship of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Water is a beautiful emblem of that inward spiritual purification, without which man being unclean is incapable of admission into the kingdom. By its use in the administration of baptism, the subject of it confesses what God has affirmed, the necessity of a new and spiritual birth in order to salvation, while at the same time he professedly surrenders himself to those cleansing influences which he infinitely needs.

God has been pleased to appoint this ordinance also as a *seal* of his covenant with the penitent and believing sinner ;—as an assurance that instead of the law of works which requires perfect obedience from the beginning, he will accept the righteousness of faith. The cheerful reception of this baptismal seal, thus placing implicit confidence in the divine promise as did Abraham, is in itself an act of faith and among the first fruits of the spirit.

In order then to acceptable baptism, we must be solemnly introduced into the visible kingdom of God, by the baptismal formula, and with the use of water as a *sign* of spiritual cleansing, and as a seal of the righteousness of faith. Thus we are baptized not into an ocean, nor into a basin, but into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Of what consequence is it,—to Him who has said, “*wash* you, make you clean”—“I will *pour* out my spirit upon the gentiles”—“So shall he *sprinkle* many nations;” and again, “I will *sprinkle* clean water upon you and ye shall be clean”—whether the mere outward emblem of the inward spiritual grace, thus variously represented, should descend upon its subjects like the dew, be poured out as a shower, or overwhelm as the sea? Let us be solemnly introduced into the covenant presence of God; let us enter the fold from which we have so grievously departed; let us receive upon ourselves the good Shepherd’s mark; let us live with Christ in faith and obedience, and the covenant love of the Father will not fail.

It is earnestly hoped that the time is not distant when the true nature of the church, and the design of its ordinances will be better understood. It is God’s institution, the pavilion of the Highest, the TEMPLE of the Holy One. The terms of admission are repentance and faith—actual repentance and faith in the case of adults, prospective repentance and faith in the case of their children. The initiatory rite is baptism. All baptized persons, not excluding infants, are mem-

bers of it, to be educated amidst its enlightening, regenerating and sanctifying influences—to be kindly restrained from evil, and trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. What Christian, about to enter the celestial city, would not wish to leave his children within the enclosures of his Saviour's earthly kingdom, where the inhabitants, professedly brethren, are all bound to seek the eternal good of each other's offspring, especially of those fatherless and motherless ones, who otherwise might be fatally exposed to the temptations of the world. The church indeed is not the Saviour, nor should it be regarded with superstitious veneration—nor ever be suffered to stand between the soul and God. But as an institution always illumined, when in its best estate, with the immediate presence of the Spirit, as a divinely appointed means of grace to its young members, let it be held in the highest estimation. Let its adult members be faithful to their trusts, so that dying believers when they bid adieu to their weeping orphans, may rest the more confidently upon the covenant promises of God while they feel an assurance that these objects of their love, will still enjoy the prayers, the instructions, the affectionate supervision of saints—and instead of being neglected and suffered to grow up as heathen, forgetful of their father's God, will be educated for glory, honor and immortality, and for a happy re-union with them, in the society of all the church of the first-born in heaven.





